A cross-cultural meta-analysis of how leader emotional intelligence influences subordinate task performance and organizational citizenship behavior

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ABSTRACT

Global human resource managers need to understand which personality characteristics contribute to leadership effectiveness in different cultures for both selection and training purposes. This meta-analysis demonstrates that leaders' emotional intelligence (EI) demonstrates incremental validity and relative weight in predicting subordinates' task performance and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) after controlling for the Big Five and cognitive ability. The relationship between leaders' EI and subordinates' task performance is stronger in collectivistic, feminine, and high uncertainty avoidance cultures. The relationship between leaders' EI and subordinates' OCB is stronger in high power distance, collectivistic, feminine, high uncertainty avoidance, long-term oriented, and restraint cultures.

1. Introduction

The increasingly competitive world economy makes leadership selection and development even more crucial to multinational corporations (Caligiuri & Tarique, 2012). As Caligiuri and Tarique (2012) noted, a survey by IBM found that global chief human resources administrators rated future leadership development as the top competency required to achieve business objectives, yet leadership development was also regarded as one of their least effective proficiencies (IBM, 2010). Other studies have also highlighted the difficulties that multinational enterprises (MNEs) face when developing talent, especially at the top leadership levels (Mellahi & Collings, 2010). In order to develop effective global leadership training programs, human resources managers need to know which personality traits and skills contribute to leadership effectiveness (Caligiuri & Tarique, 2012).

Personality traits have been shown to be predictors of expatriates' success (Caligiuri, 2000) and of leadership success in global environments (Caligiuri, 1997; Gupta & Govindarajan, 2002). Personality traits, such as openness to new experiences and extraversion, that reduce ethnocentrism and that increase cultural flexibility and tolerance for ambiguity, may be particularly strong predictors of cross-cultural adjustment (Caligiuri & Tarique, 2012). Other researchers have found that emotional intelligence (EI) aids cross-cultural communication

(Lillis & Tian, 2009) and cross-cultural adjustment (Lin, Chen, & Song, 2012). This may be because skills related to learning about other cultures (Caligiuri & Tarique, 2012), such as the ability to read others' emotions, attend to emotional cues, and show empathy (Yamazaki & Kayes, 2004; Yoo, Matsumoto, & LeRoux, 2006), are related to EI and promote cross-cultural adjustment.

The GLOBE study found that preferences for leadership styles varied considerably by culture (Dorfman & House, 2004; Javidan, Stahl, Brodbeck, & Wilderom, 2005). Because personality traits and related competencies predict leadership styles, this suggests that the effectiveness of various traits and competencies will also vary by culture.

As Triandis (1989) convincingly demonstrated, culture has an important influence on human behavior. For example, he found that the degree to which cultures vary in individualism–collectivism, tightness–looseness, and cultural complexity interacted with facets of the self (private, public, and collective) to determine human behavior. Leaders who are unable to adjust their leadership styles and behaviors to fit the demands of the local culture will find themselves ineffective. In order to adjust their behaviors, they need to know which competencies are most effective in the culture they are operating in. Knowledge of these competencies, and how they are influenced by culture, would also help when it comes to assigning employees to leadership positions in other cultures. MNEs could assign leaders based on the match between their

characteristics and the effectiveness of those characteristics in the cultures being considered.

In this study, we examine the effectiveness of one particular trait, EI, in different cultural settings. Below, we go over the research on emotions in the workplace, and then relate this research to the work on culture and leadership. Although we expect and hypothesize that culture will have a significant effect on the value of EI to leadership, we recognize that research has also shown that all cultures agree that some values exist (Schwartz, 1992). Despite this agreement, the degree to which these values influence managers' work behaviors may still depend upon cultural contexts (Smith, Peterson, & Schwartz, 2002). Den Hartog et al. used the GLOBE data to show both culture specific and cross-culturally generalizable effects (Den Hartog et al., 1999). Likewise, Lee, Scandura, and Sharif (2014) examined leader-member exchange relations and concluded that "cultures have consequences" with both mean differences in ratings and with moderation effects by national cultural dimensions. It may be that EI is universally valued across cultures, but that the strength of the relationship between EI and leadership effectiveness will still vary across cultures to a significant and meaningful degree.

Although reviews of the literature have generally found support for the importance of EI to leadership, no meta-analyses have yet established that emotionally intelligent leaders can increase the job performance of their followers. Thus, the second major purpose of this study is to test the leader EI—subordinate job performance relationship, using meta-analytic techniques to obtain the most precise estimates of effect sizes and of incremental validity. Although job performance has often been conceptualized as individual task performance, Organ (1997) convincingly argued that OCB is another important type of performance. This viewpoint is strongly supported by a meta-analysis which found that OCB improves both organizational and individual outcomes (Podsakoff, Whiting, Podsakoff, & Blume, 2009). We will examine the leader EI—follower performance in terms of both task performance and OCB.

2. Theory and hypotheses

2.1. What is emotional intelligence?

Best-selling books have advocated EI as important to life success and as crucial to leadership and organizational effectiveness (Cherniss, 2001; Goleman, 1995; Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002). Although there are different ways to conceptualize EI, most definitions involve the ability to be aware of one's own and others' emotions, to regulate emotions, and to reason effectively using emotions (Goleman, 1995; Petrides, 2009a, 2009b; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). The Ashkanasy and Daus (2005) classification of EI measures has become widely used in research articles and textbooks (e.g., Humphrey, 2013; Miao, Humphrey, & Qian, 2016; Miao, Humphrey, & Qian, 2017a; O'Boyle, Humphrey, Pollack, Hawver, & Story, 2011; Walter, Cole, & Humphrey, 2011). They classified EI measures into three types, which are commonly referred to as ability EI, self-report EI, and mixed EI. Mayer et al. created their ability scale, the MSCEIT V2.0 (Mayer, Salovey, Caruso, & Sitarenios, 2003), to show that EI measures can satisfy the traditional criteria for intelligence measures by having objective right and wrong answers. Other scholars maintain that EI has trait-like properties and should be assessed the way personality traits are assessed, i.e., through self-report EI measures (Jordan, Ashkanasy, Hartel, & Hooper, 2002; Jordan & Troth, 2011; Petrides, 2009a, 2009b; Petrides & Furnham, 2003; Saklofske, Austin, & Minski, 2003; Schutte et al., 1998; Siegling, Vesely, Petrides, & Saklofske, 2015; Wong & Law, 2002). According to Petrides and his colleagues, EI consists of "a constellation of behavioral dispositions and self-perceptions concerning one's ability to recognize, process, and utilize emotion-laden information." (Petrides, Frederickson, & Furnham, 2004, p. 278). Mixed EI measures also use self-report items; they are differentiated from the other self-report

measures by their use of competencies as well as traits (e.g., Bar-On, 2000; Boyatzis, Brizz, & Godwin, 2011). More recently, a "behavioral approach" based on peer ratings of EI has also been examined, but more research on this needs to be done before it can be included in meta-analytical studies (Boyatzis, Rochford, & Cavanagh, 2017).

Walter, Humphrey, and Cole (2012) argued that EI "unleashes" leadership potential. Support for this contention comes from studies that find that leaders score higher on EI than followers do (Siegling, Sfeir, & Smyth, 2014a; Siegling, Nielsen, & Petrides, 2014b). Other studies have also found that emotionally intelligent leaders are more effective in a variety of ways (Ashkanasy & Daus, 2002; Ashkanasy & Humphrey, 2011a, 2011b; Boyatzis et al., 2011; George, 2000; Walter & Bruch, 2009). A review of the literature concluded that leaders' EI was positively related to leadership emergence, the performance of effective leadership behaviors (such as transformational leadership), and to overall leadership effectiveness (Walter et al., 2011). Finally, a meta-analysis found that leaders' EI was positively related to subordinates' job satisfaction (Miao et al., 2016).

2.2. Emotional intelligence and cross-cultural moderators

The major purpose of this investigation is to examine cross-cultural moderators of the leader EI—follower task performance and OCB relationships. National culture has a tremendous effect on the context where job roles are performed; hence, it is critical to examine the cross-cultural validity of EI (Di Fabio, Saklofske, & Tremblay, 2016; Emmerling & Boyatzis, 2012; Miao et al., 2016). Previous studies have demonstrated that cultural values can have an important influence on the development of EI. For example, Gunkel, Schlägel, and Engle (2014) surveyed a sample of 2067 individuals in nine countries and demonstrated that cultural values influenced EI, with especially large effects on the cultural dimensions of collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term orientation. In a later study, Gunkel, Schlaegel, and Taras (2016) examined how EI acts a mediator in the relationships between culture and conflict handling styles. Prior research (Jordan & Troth, 2004), along with a meta-analysis (Schlaerth, Ensari, & Christian, 2013), has demonstrated that EI is related to the use of positive conflict management techniques. Consistent with these earlier studies, Gunkel et al. (2016) found that EI mediated between cultural value dimensions and conflict handling styles. Research has also shown that EI positively influences the degree to which expatriates experience general living, interactional, and work-related cross-cultural adjustment (Koveshnikov, Wechtler, & Dejoux, 2014).

There is also considerable evidence that cultural values influence emotions and our outcome variables. For example, Reus (2012) found that cultural differences influenced "emotional attending" during mergers and acquisitions, and Reus stated (p. 342) that "emotional attending involves not only striving to make acquired organization members feel good but also instills a climate of recognizing and sharing emotions (cf. Druskat & Wolff, 2001; Huy, 1999)." Taras, Kirkman, and Steel (2010) meta-analyzed over three decades worth of studies on Hofstede's (2001, 2011) cultural value dimensions, and examined 598 studies with over 200,000 respondents. Their meta-analysis confirmed the long-held belief that cultural differences influence emotional expressivity. For example, they found that cultural values influenced characteristics such as a "tendency to display emotions", "openness in communication," and "sensitivity to others." Cultural values also influenced the levels of depression, anxiety, and "embarrassability." A variety of work-related behaviors were also influenced, including "effort", "cooperation with colleagues", "innovation" and "entrepreneurial behavior." Most importantly for our study, they also found that cultural values influenced "organizational citizenship."

The Taras et al. (2010) meta-analysis also found that preferences for leadership style varied by cultural value dimensions, including preferences for charismatic, directive, participative and inspirational leadership styles, with a particularly large difference regarding preferences