Leader emotional intelligence and subordinate job satisfaction: A meta-analysis of main, mediator, and moderator effects

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ABSTRACT

Based on a meta-analysis, leaders' emotional intelligence (EI) positively relates to subordinates' job satisfaction ($\rho = 0.308$). All three EI streams (ability, self-report, mixed) exhibit significant incremental validity and relative importance (RW) in the presence of personality and cognitive ability in predicting subordinates' job satisfaction (ability EI: $\Delta R^2 = 0.002$, RW% = 3.5%; self-report EI: $\Delta R^2 = 0.021$, RW% = 25.3%; mixed EI: $\Delta R^2 = 0.085$, RW% = 49.9%). Leaders' EI demonstrates significant incremental validity and RW in the presence of subordinates' EI in predicting subordinates' job satisfaction (leaders' EI: $\Delta R^2 = 0.054$, RW% = 48.0%). Subordinates' EI positively relates to leaders' EI and mediates the relationship between leaders' EI and subordinates' job satisfaction. Moderator analyses indicate that (1) ability EI has a lower association with subordinates' job satisfaction than self-report EI and mixed EI; and (2) leaders' EI more positively relates to subordinates' job satisfaction in low in-group collectivistic or low humane oriented cultures.

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1. Introduction

The popularity along with controversy of the construct of emotional intelligence (EI) draws a substantial amount of attention from both researchers and practitioners, leading to the publication of a number of qualitative and quantitative review papers and books (e.g., Goleman, 1995; Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002; Martins, Ramalho, & Morin, 2010; Mayer & Salovey, 1997; O'Boyle, Humphrey, Pollack, Hawver, & Story, 2011; Schutte, Malouff, Thorsteinsson, Bhullar, & Rooke, 2007). EI has been proven to be a major predictor of important outcomes, such as mental and physical health (Johnson, Batey, & Holdsworth, 2009; Martins et al., 2010; Schutte et al., 2007). Research has also demonstrated that trait EI has a genetic basis, which again substantiates the existence of EI as an important and independent trait (Vernon, Petrides, Bratko, & Schermer, 2008).

EI is a predictor of leader effectiveness (Ashkanasy & Daus, 2002; Boyatzis, Brizz, & Godwin, 2011; George, 2000; Siegling, Sfeir, & Smyth, 2014a; Siegling, Nielsen, & Petrides, 2014b; Walter, Cole, & Humphrey, 2011; Walter, Humphrey, & Cole, 2012). Walter et al. (2012) suggested that EI unleashes leadership potential. This view is supported by evidence

that leaders score higher on EI than do followers (Siegling, Sfeir, et al., 2014; Siegling, Nielsen, et al., 2014). A summary of peer-reviewed published studies reported that leaders' EI was related to leadership emergence, the performance of effective leadership behaviors, and overall leadership effectiveness (Walter et al., 2011).

In this study we performed a meta-analysis on how leaders' EI relates to subordinates' job satisfaction. Individual studies have shown a relationship between EI and job satisfaction (e.g., Kafetsios & Zampetakis, 2008; Ouyang, Sang, Li, & Peng, 2015), yet to date there has not been a meta-analysis of how leaders' EI influences subordinates' job satisfaction. We believe there are five major reasons why such a meta-analysis is needed. First, job attitudes are "one of the oldest, most popular, and most influential areas of inquiry in all of organizational psychology" (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012, p. 342). A review found that "no construct in all of organizational research has been studied more than job satisfaction" (Schleicher, Hansen, & Fox, 2011, p. 147) across different types of job attitudes. Thus future EI research should study additional outcomes beyond job performance, such as job satisfaction – an important type of leader effectiveness (DeRue, Nahrgang, Wellman, & Humphrey, 2011). Job satisfaction is an important central construct in organizational psychology that influences behaviors of importance to organizations (Schleicher et al., 2011). For example, job satisfaction has been shown to influence job performance, organizational citizenship behavior, counterproductive work behavior, physical and psychological health outcomes, and withdrawal cognitions and

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behaviors (Schleicher et al., 2011). Therefore, understanding how leaders' EI influences subordinates' job satisfaction allows us to make inferences about how leaders' EI affects other important organizational outcomes. Accordingly, the first purpose of this meta-analysis is to assess the validity of leaders' EI in predicting subordinates' job satisfaction. To improve the methodological rigor of the current study, we also test the validity of leaders' EI in predicting subordinates' job satisfaction in the presence of both cognitive ability and the big five personality traits (i.e., the five factor model - FFM). Including these control variables is consistent with best practices as performed by other EI meta-analysis (Martins et al., 2010).

Second, Daus, Dasborough, Jordan, and Ashkanasy (2012) presented a theoretical model that merges organizational culture literature with emotional intelligence literature, which suggests a relationship between leaders' EI and subordinates' EI. As such, the second purpose of our study is to meta-analytically assess this model (the link between leaders' EI and subordinates' EI in particular); in addition, we build on this model to explore whether subordinates' EI mediates the relationship between leaders' EI and subordinates' job satisfaction.

Third, although Walter et al. (2011) found strong support for the relationship between leader EI and leader effectiveness, there was enough variability across studies to suggest that moderators may exist. Similar calls for exploring moderators have been noted in some other studies as well. For instance, Farh, Seo, and Tesluk (2012) indicated that future EI research should follow a context-based approach because the validity of EI may depend on work contexts. So the third purpose of this study is to examine how the type of measurement used and contextual factors, in particular hierarchical level and firm type, influence the size of the leader EI – subordinate job satisfaction relationship.

Recent studies also indicated that EI research does not adequately incorporate national culture (Wong, Law, & Wong, 2004); therefore, the generalizability of existing findings discovered in Western countries to other countries/cultures remains unclear, and cross-cultural similarities and variations in EI require more exploration (Di Fabio, Saklofske, & Tremblay, 2016; Emmerling & Boyatzis, 2012; Ouyang et al., 2015; Walter et al., 2011). Thereby, the fourth purpose of this meta-analysis is to study how the relationship between leaders' EI and subordinates' job satisfaction is moderated by cultural dimensions.

Fifth, George (2000) lamented that "leadership theory and research have not adequately considered how leaders' moods and emotions influence their effectiveness as leaders" (p. 1028). To address this concern, the current study builds on multiple theories, such as affective events theory (AET) (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), emotional contagion theory (Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1992), and the multilevel model of emotion and leadership (Ashkanasy, 2003; Ashkanasy & Humphrey, 2011a, 2011b), to explain how leaders' EI contributes to subordinates' job satisfaction. AET can help us understand how leaders can influence the events that occur throughout the day that sway subordinates' moods (and thus job satisfaction). Emotional contagion theory can help us understand how leaders' emotions spread to their followers (and vice-versa). Finally, the multilevel model ties together the research on AET and emotional contagion and creates a unifying framework for understanding how leaders influence their followers' emotions and thus their job satisfaction.

The present study unfolds as follows. First, we review relevant theories and literature and we develop hypotheses based on the theories. Second, we present the method and results sections to show how we assess (1) the relationship between leaders' EI and subordinates' job satisfaction; (2) how leaders' EI predicts subordinates' job satisfaction above and beyond cognitive ability and personality simultaneously; (3) how leaders' EI predicts subordinates' job satisfaction above and beyond subordinates' EI; and (4) how the relationship between leaders' EI and subordinates' job satisfaction is moderated. Third, we discuss the theoretical and practical implications and the future directions of the present study.

2. Theory and hypotheses

2.1. Leader EI and subordinate job satisfaction

Job satisfaction refers to "an evaluative state that expresses contentment with and positive feelings about one's job" (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012, p. 343). Job satisfaction has two relevant components, namely affective (feelings toward one's job) and cognitive (cognitive evaluation of one's job) components (Fisher, 2000; Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012; Weiss, Nicholas, & Daus, 1999). Job satisfaction has been a primary focus of organizational researchers and practitioners for years, due to its influences on a variety of workplace outcomes (Schleicher et al., 2011).

Ashkanasy and Daus reviewed the EI literature and classified EI research into three major streams. We refer to these three streams as ability EI (stream 1), self-report EI (stream 2), and mixed EI (stream 3). Some examples of measures are the Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT V2.0) (Mayer, Salovey, Caruso, & Sitarenios, 2003) for ability EI, the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS) (Wong & Law, 2002) for self-report EI, and the Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i) (Bar-On, 2000, 2002) and the Emotional Competency Inventory (ECI) (Wolff, 2006) for mixed EI. The ECI was revised to become the Emotional and Social Competency Inventory (ESCI) (Boyatzis et al., 2011).

Among the three streams of EI, ability EI instruments, such as the MSCEIT V2.0, were developed to satisfy the conventional criteria for intelligence scales by incorporating objective right and wrong answers (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2002). Although EI can be conceptualized as an ability, other scholars conceptualize it in trait terms (Petrides, 2009a, 2009b; Petrides & Furnham, 2003; Smith, Saklofskea, & Yan, 2015). These scholars have developed measures such as the Assessing Emotions Scales (AES) (Schutte et al., 1998) and the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (TEIQue) (Petrides, 2009a, 2009b; Petrides & Furnham, 2003). The AES has been shown to predict a variety of important outcomes, such as mood repair following negative events (Schutte, Malouff, Simunek, Hollander, & McKenley, 2002). The TEIQue has also been supported in independent investigations (Mikolajczak, Luminet, Leroy, & Roy, 2007). The TEIQue provides an example of how scholars conceptualize the dimensions of EI. The TEIQue has four dimensions: emotionality, self-control, sociability, and well-being (Petrides, 2009a, 2009b). Petrides, Pita, and Kokkinaki (2007) analyzed the relationship of the TEIQue to other personality constructs. They "performed two joint factor analyses to determine the location of trait EI in Eysenckian and Big Five factor space. The results showed that trait EI is a compound personality construct located at the lower levels of the two taxonomies" (Petrides et al., 2007, page 273). Their results support the "conceptualization of trait EI as a lower-order construct that comprehensively encompasses the emotion-related facets of personality" (Petrides et al., 2007, page 287). Moreover, they found that the TEIQue showed incremental predictability over the Big Five with regard to life satisfaction, rumination, rational coping, detached coping, and emotional coping. Later studies have confirmed that a short form of the TEIQue also has incremental predictability (Siegling, Vesely, Petrides, & Saklofske, 2015). A meta-analysis has established that the TEIQue is not redundant with other personality measures, and that it shows incremental predictability with regard to personality traits when predicting important outcomes, such as burnout and depression, alcohol abuse, academic achievement, and life and job satisfaction (Andrei, Siegling, Aloe, Baldaro, & Petrides, 2016). The stream 3 measures are similar to the stream 2 measures in that they use self- and peer reports; however, they include a larger number of dimensions. For example, the ESCI has 14 dimensions (Boyatzis et al., 2011). Stream 3 measures can also be conceptualized from the trait EI perspective.

Affective events theorists posit that each individual has an average affective mood level, and that some individuals have negative affective mood levels whereas others have positive affective mood levels;