The Influence of Leader Emotional Intelligence on Employees’ Job Satisfaction: A Meta-Analysis

**Short Description**

Meta-analysis reveals that leader emotional intelligence (EI) is positively related to subordinate job satisfaction ( = .303) and group satisfaction ( = .600), and it also exhibits incremental validity and relative importance in the presence of employee EI when predicting job satisfaction.

**Problem, Need, and Significance**

Although 20 studies have examined how leader EI impacts subordinates’ job satisfaction and group satisfaction, there has not been a quantitative review of this literature. Based on the theoretical foundation of the multilevel model of emotion and leadership (Ashkanasy, 2003; Ashkanasy & Humphrey, 2011a, 2011b; Humphrey, 2013), the present meta-analytic review addresses how leader EI is associated with subordinates’ job satisfaction and group satisfaction. Thus this investigation makes a contribution by linking the literatures on EI, leadership, and job satisfaction.

**Framework**

*Employee EI and Employee Job Satisfaction*. Emotional Intelligence (EI) (Mayer, Roberts, & Barsade, 2008; Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Tett, Fox, & Wang, 2005) is defined as “as the set of abilities (verbal and nonverbal) that enable a person to generate, recognize, express, understand, and evaluate their own, and others, emotions in order to guide thinking and action that successfully cope with environmental demands and pressures” (Van Rooy & Viswesvaran, 2004; p. 72). The construct of EI has received substantial attention from researchers and practitioners in the fields of psychology and management (Joseph & Newman, 2010; Goleman, 2000; Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2004; Kellett, Humphrey, & Sleeth, 2006; Kluemper, DeGroot, & Choi, 2013; Law, Wong, & Song, 2004; Mayer, Roberts, & Barsade, 2008). EI is argued to be an important predictor of job performance (Goleman, 1995) and effective leadership (Boyatzis, Brizz, & Godwin, 2011; Goleman, 2000; Walter & Bruch, 2009; Walter, Humphrey, & Cole, 2012). A summary of peer-reviewed published studies found that leader EI was related to leadership emergence, the performance of effective leadership behaviors, and overall leadership effectiveness (Walter, Cole, & Humphrey, 2011). There is a large volume of evidence confirming the predictive and construct validity of EI and indicating that EI is an important predictor of outcomes such as academic performance, emotional labor, job performance, organizational citizenship behavior/deviance; leadership, life satisfaction, interpersonal relationship quality, negotiation, political skill, stress, trust, and work–family conflict (Ashkanasy & Daus, 2002; Ciarrochi, Chan, & Caputi, 2000; Ferris et al., 2005; Fulmer & Barry, 2004; Humphrey, 2002, 2013; Humphrey, Pollack, & Hawver, 2008; Jordan, Ashkanasy, & Hartel, 2002; Kellett et al., 2006; Kluemper, DeGroot, & Choi, 2013; Lopes, Salovey, & Straus, 2003; O’Boyle, Humphrey, Pollack, Hawver, & Story, 2011).

Research findings indicated that EI is not only critical for successful job performance but also helps to curb employee stresses, reduce turnover intentions, and improve job satisfaction (Daus, & Ashkanasy, 2005). Sy et al. (2006) explained that emotionally intelligent individuals are more resilient and adept at evaluating and regulating their own emotions, and it makes sense that this resiliency can help with job satisfaction. Job satisfaction has been defined as “an evaluative state that expresses contentment with and positive feelings about one’s job” (p. 343, Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012). Researchers have variously defined job satisfaction as either as a collection of attitudes concerning various facets of a job or as a universal feeling about a job (Chiva & Alegre, 2008). Job satisfaction consists of both affective and cognitive components (Fisher, 2000; Weiss, Nicholas, & Daus, 1999), and job satisfaction is important to an employee’s well being at work (Carmeli, 2003; Grandey, 2000).

*Leader EI, Subordinate Job Satisfaction, and Group Satisfaction*. Affective Events Theory (Weiss, et. al, 1999) suggests that responding to discrete “affective events” in the workplace will influence affective responses, thus leading to affective, attitudinal, and behavioral outcomes (Ashkanasy & Humphrey, 2011b; Johnson, 2009; Walter & Bruch, 2009). Leaders generally have the capacity to reduce the effect of negative affective events on follower reactions and leaders’ behaviors can be affective events for their followers (Johnson, 2009). Emotionally intelligent leaders take the role of “emotional manager” to set up a positive “affective tone” (Humphrey, 2002; Pescosolido, 2002) for their subordinates and to create positive affect events for them. They spread a feeling of happiness and cheerfulness to enhance subordinates’ positive state affect and satisfaction via emotional contagion. Emotional contagion occurs when emotions transmit from one person to another; further, individuals catch and share moods with each other and mimic each others’ emo­tional expressions via body langue and vocal tone (Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1992).

Emotionally savvy leaders are able to harness and transmit their emotions via emotional contagion mechanisms to lift their followers’ positive feeling and satisfaction levels. Research findings also showed that emotional contagion more often flows from leaders (and power-holders) to followers rather than vice-versa. This is because followers depend more on their leaders due to leaders’ control over time, resources, and interactions (Epitropaki, 2006; Sy, Côté, & Saavedra, 2005). Sy et al. (2005) found that group members experience more positive and less negative moods when leaders have positive moods. This effect also generalizes to the group level so that leaders with positive moods make groups have a more positive and a less negative affective tone. It is of note that emotional displays play a critical role in shaping subordinates’ impressions of their leaders’ sincerity (Dasborough & Ashkanasy, 2002) and of their leaders’ charisma (Groves, 2005). Emotionally intelligent leaders are proficient at displaying emotions, invoking emotions in others, and conveying a message of authenticity to their subordinates, thus increasing subordinates’ job satisfaction.

**Questions and Content: Hypotheses**

High EI, in particular the ability to perceive and understand emotions, may also help leaders recognize when they need to empathize with employees who are experiencing problems. For instance, Kellett and her colleagues found that the ability to perceive others emotions predicted empathy, which in turn predicted both relations and task leadership (Kellett et al., 2006). Thus, emotionally savvy leaders can improve their followers’ job satisfaction by displaying empathy and demonstrating that they care about their followers’ well-being. Likewise, Wong and Law (2002) argued that followers’ satisfaction will be boosted if leaders treat followers with psychological benefits such as approval, respect, esteem, and affection. They argued that leaders high on EI would be more likely to provide these benefits, and their study found a positive link between leader EI and subordinate job satisfaction. Hence, we provide the following hypothesis.

*Hypothesis 1: Leaders’ EI should significantly and positively relate to subordinates’ job satisfaction.*

The multilevel model of emotion (Ashkanasy, 2003; Ashkanasy & Humphrey, 2011a, 2011b) suggests that leader EI and employee EI should be related to employee job satisfaction via different mechanisms. For the relationship between employee EI and employee job satisfaction, employees manage their own emotions to cope with stress and to experience positive feelings to elevate their satisfaction level (Ashkanasy & Humphrey, 2011b). For the relationship between leader EI and employee job satisfaction, leaders become mood managers of their employees by creating a positive affective tone and by helping their employees overcome the mood-damaging effects of negative events (Ashkanasy & Humphrey, 2011a, 2011b; Humphrey, 2012). Through emotional contagion mechanisms, emotionally intelligent leaders create emotional synchronization (or resonance) by showing confident and enthusiastic emotional displays to enhance their employees’ positive feelings (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2004). Emotionally intelligent leaders are also able to build collective social identities among their employees to navigate them to collectively move toward productive emotional states (Humphrey, 2013). Team members who are on the same emotional wave-length are likely to share a common identity that may foster a group’s shared attitude toward its task and work environment (i.e., group satisfaction; Mason & Griffin, 2002; Zampetakis & Moustakis, 2011). Due to these reasons, we present the following hypotheses.

*Hypothesis 2: Leaders’ EI should contribute incremental validity and relative importance in predicting employee job satisfaction in the presence of employees’ EI.*

*Hypothesis 3: Leaders’ EI should significantly and positively relate to group satisfaction.*

**Design and Methodology**

*Literature Search.* First, we searched electronic databases, such as *ABI/INFORM, EBSCO Host* (e.g., *Academic Search Complete, Business Source Complete*)*,* *Google,* *Google Scholar,* *JSTOR, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, PsycNET* (*e.g., PsycInfo* and *PsycArticles*)*,* and *Social Science Index Citation.* Second, major journals and conferences in psychology and management were also searched. A primary study was deemed eligible for being included if it was empirical and quantitative, used employee samples (not student samples), and used scales designed to measure EI (not proxy measures). This resulted in 132 studies, 138 samples, and a sample size of 27,561.

*Meta-analytic Procedures*. We performed psychometric meta-analysis using the procedures developed by Hunter and Schmidt (2004) to synthesize collected data. We thereby corrected for measurement errors in both independent and dependent variables for each individual correlation. We noted that some primary studies did not report the reliability. Thus, we imputed the missing reliability for both independent and dependent variables by using the mean of reliabilities of the studies that reported reliability information (Hunter & Schmidt, 2004). We presented corrected sample-size-weighted mean correlation () as the estimate of population mean correlation.

To examine the incremental validity and relative importance of EI in predicting job satisfaction, we created meta-analytically derived corrected correlation matrices and performed both hierarchical multiple regression and relative weight analyses (Johnson, 2000; Johnson, 2001; Johnson & LeBreton, 2004). Relative weight analyses produces more accurate estimates of the relative importance of each predictor in predicting an outcome in a multivariate model with correlated predictors (Johnson, 2000). For example, a weight of .4 for a predictor is twice as important as another predictor with a weight of .2 in a model where these two predictors are correlated.

**Results, Findings, and Outcomes**

Table 1 contains the results of the relationship between EI and job satisfaction based on psychometric meta-analysis. The relationship between employee EI and employee job satisfaction (*k* = 118, *N* = 25,068) was positive and statistically significant ( = .324) because the corrected 95% confidence interval spanned from .287 to .362 and did not include zero. Table 1 also presents the results for the relationship between leader EI and subordinate job satisfaction (*k* = 17, *N* = 3,452) as well as the relationship between leader EI and group satisfaction (*k* = 3, *N* = 214). Our results showed that leader EI is positively and significantly related to both subordinate job satisfaction ( = .303) and group satisfaction ( = .600) because neither of the confidence intervals for these two distributions includes zero. Hypothesis 1 and hypothesis 3 are supported.

Table 2 presents the results of incremental validity analysis for leader EI. Employee EI alone explained 10.5% (*p* < .001) of the variance in employee job satisfaction. When leader EI was entered into the regression model, it explained an additional 5.0% (*p* < .001) of the variance in employee job satisfaction. Hence, leader EI contributed significant incremental validity above and beyond employee EI in predicting employee job satisfaction. Table 2 also shows the results of relative weight analysis for leader EI and employee EI in the last two columns of step 2. Leader EI captured 45.8% of the explained variance along with a *R*2 contribution of 0.07. Leader EI is almost as important as employee EI in predicting employee job satisfaction. Thus Hypothesis 2 is supported.

**Conclusions**

Our results provide strong evidence to support the multilevel model of emotion and leadership (Ashkanasy & Humphrey, 2011a, 2011b). The multilevel model of emotion theorized that individual differences—a level 2 variable–influence the experience of positive and negative emotions, thus influencing employees’ attitudes. We found that EI, as an individual difference variable, does positively influence employee job satisfaction – an important type of job attitude. Interpersonal interactions are a level 3 variable while the leadership of groups and teams is a level 4 variable. Leaders’ EI influenced both employees’ individual job satisfaction as well as group level job satisfaction.

**Implications**

The effects sizes and large relative weight (45.8% relative importance of leader EI versus 54.2% relative importance of employee EI) suggests that leader emotional intelligence has a substantial and important effect on employee job satisfaction.

Table 1a

Psychometric Meta-Analysis Results

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | *k* | *N* |  | *SDr* |  | *SDρ* | Varart% | Corrected 95% CI | Corrected 80% CR |  |
| Employee EI - Employee JS | 118 | 25,068 | .273 | .175 | .324 | .192 | 13 | .287 to .362 | .079 to .570 |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Leader EI – Subordinate JS | 17 | 3,452 | .252 | .182 | .303 | .206 | 13 | .263 to .343 | .040 to .566 |  |
| Leader EI – Group Satisfaction | 3 | 214 | .518 | .223 | .600 | .239 | 15 | .554 to .647 | .294 to .906 |  |

a *k* = number of independent samples; *N* = sample size; = uncorrected sample-size-weighted mean correlation; *SDr* = sample-size-weighted standard deviation of observed mean correlations; = corrected sample-size-weighted mean correlation; *SDρ* = sample-size-weighted standard deviation of corrected mean correlations; Varart% = percent of variance in explained by statistical artifacts; Corrected 95% CI = corrected 95% confidence interval; Corrected 80% CR = corrected 80% credibility interval; EI = emotional intelligence; JS = job satisfaction.

Table 2a

Hierarchical Multiple Regression and Relative Weight Analyses for Employee EI and Leader EI

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Employee JS | | | | |
|  | Step 1 |  | Step 2 | | |
|  | β |  | β | RW | RW% |
| Employee EI | 0.324\*\*\* |  | 0.261\*\*\* | .084 | 54.2 |
| Leader EI |  |  | 0.232\*\*\* | .071 | 45.8 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| *R2* | .105\*\*\* |  | .155\*\*\* |  |  |
| Δ*R2* |  |  | .050\*\*\* |  |  |

a *N* (harmonic mean sample size) = 2,329; β = standardized regression weights; RW = relative weight; RW% = percent of relative weight (computed by dividing individual relative weight by the sum of individual relative weight and multiplying by 100); *R2* = multiple correlations; Δ*R2* = incremental change in *R2*; EI = emotional intelligence; JS = job satisfaction.  
\*\*\**p* < .001.