

**Emotional Intelligence and Women in Leadership:
Connections and Applications**

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Leadership and management have been popular subjects in the past few years, mostly related to personal career advancement. There have been seminars, articles and even best selling books written on the topic. The concept of non-IQ forms of intelligence, such as emotional intelligence, are only emerging but are quickly acquiring attention. The notion of women in leadership and management has been less widely studied and in some cases, such as female manager effectiveness, it is considered a controversial topic. Factors such as non-validated measures and biases of researchers may have created unbalanced literature, which must be carefully interpreted. The objective of the following discussion of literature is to support a relationship between emotional intelligence and female manager effectiveness. The importance of this relationship will be examined as it relates to the acceleration of women in the managerial workforce and as it applies to a specific profession, dietetics.

Recent emotional intelligence research findings are mixed and are based upon two major models, the Ability and the Mixed models of emotional intelligence. These models have faced some criticism, which will be briefly discussed. Emotional intelligence is an important area of study as it has been suggested that being more emotionally competent can improve almost any area of our lives. Emotional intelligence might have particularly useful applications in leadership, and might be associated with women's styles of leading. Some research shows that women score higher on measures of emotional intelligence than men. These scores are valuable to examine because emotionally intelligent traits are becoming increasingly demanded in the workplace. If women are proficient in these competencies, their higher emotional intelligence scores might reduce the discrimination

they face during attempts to rise in management positions, and instead advertise women as skilled leaders.

What is Emotional Intelligence?

Since the late 1980's emotional intelligence has been widely researched, and has emerged as an important attribute for predicting success, especially in leadership and management positions (1, 2). Emotional intelligence is related to various traits that are highly correlated with effective leadership (3). These traits are valuable in problem solving and adapting to situations to make better decisions in the management of people and organizations.

There are two major models of emotional intelligence. The first, developed by Mayer and Salovey (4), is the Ability Model of emotional intelligence. In this hierarchical model, abilities of perception, facilitation, understanding and management develop consequentially each from the last, resulting in heightened emotional intelligence. During perception, emotions are identified in the self and others by reading non-verbal cues before appropriate emotions are expressed. In facilitation, emotions facilitate thought and the use of different approaches for problem solving by directing attention to important items. Understanding complex emotions and feelings from one stage to another, is required to properly manage one's own and other's emotions. In management, awareness of emotions solves problems without suppressing any negative emotions (5).

The second model is the Mixed Trait Model of emotional intelligence, which involves traits and competencies, and has been widely popularized by Daniel Goleman, author of multiple books on the topic of emotional intelligence. The competencies

associated with this model are self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills (6). Goleman's personal and social competencies require that the individual develop particular traits characteristic of emotional intelligence. Self-awareness requires emotional awareness, self-assessment and self-confidence. Self-regulation or self-management involves having self-control and being trustworthy, conscientious, adaptable and innovative. Motivation guides attainment of goals and requires such traits as commitment, initiative, optimism and achievement drive. Empathy requires understanding of others, service orientation, creating diversity and political awareness. For adept social skills, individuals need to be able to influence, communicate, manage conflict and catalyze change, lead others, build relationships and foster communication and collaboration (6).

Not unlike any popular author, Goleman has had some criticisms about his theory of emotional intelligence. These criticisms come from individuals who believe that emotional intelligence should not be considered a traditional form of intelligence because it has not met certain traditional criteria of intelligence. Other criticisms are that emotional intelligence is too loosely defined, and therefore has little meaning. One critic even goes as far as saying that advocates for multiple intelligences are simply promoting egalitarianism by redefining the definition of "smart". This way those who lack intelligence in the traditional IQ sense, but have high emotional intelligence scores will feel equivalent (7).

These arguments are countered by research that argues that emotional intelligence is indeed a true form of intelligence, as it meets the traditional standards of intelligence (2). These standards require that emotional intelligence be operationalized as a set of

abilities, and that these abilities be related to preexisting forms of intelligence. Another criterion of traditional intelligence is that it develops with age and experience, which emotional intelligence does (2, 5). Although the definition of emotional intelligence is quite broad, experts have created working definitions of the concept. Perhaps one of the best is “the ability to perceive and express emotions, to use emotions to facilitate thinking, to understand and reason with emotions, and to effectively manage emotions within oneself and in relationships with others” (4). Definitions of emotional intelligence have been altered, but with more research the concept is becoming clearer. The criticism that emotional intelligence was formed to promote egalitarianism is countered by the notion that successful managers who score highly on measures of emotional intelligence also tend to have high IQ scores.

The topic of emotional intelligence in the workplace arouses many questions. Will scores of this kind be utilized for hiring? Is emotional intelligence now more important than traditional intelligence? Do men and women differ in matters of emotional intelligence? The latter question is somewhat controversial, and can only be better understood after a closer look at women working in leadership positions.

Background: Women in Leadership

Since the 1960's and 70's women have been entering the workforce at increasing rates, creating social and economic changes and working towards equal rights. During these times women fought the typical belief that men were inherently more qualified than women for leadership; many argue this fight still continues today. Men were believed to have particular “masculine” traits that made them better suited for management positions. In the 1970's important laws were enacted opposing gender discrimination and pay

disparities between men and women (8). These laws were welcomed by women who were already working hard and facing fierce resistance in their attempts to rise into management positions. These women were facing the ‘glass ceiling’, described as a “transparent barrier preventing women from ascending management hierarchies” (8). Other aspects of women’s lives often prevented them from gaining advantages in the workplace as well. Greater responsibilities in child and family care often required absences from the workplace which allowed male coworkers to gain more experience during women’s absences.

Experts say that despite opposition in the workforce, women have broken through the glass ceiling. However, the presence of women in senior management positions is still lacking (9). In 2005 women contributed 33.1 percent of managers and 14 percent of directors. This is an increase from 1974 when only two percent of women were managers and less than one percent were directors (10). This number continues to rise as attitudes change, and women continue to work in a world that is finally waking up to the enormous benefits of a workforce operating with both men and women. When women are better represented in leadership positions the similarities and differences between men and women’s styles are observed and a greater understanding of how gender traits can be related to management occurs.

Women’s Ways

Women’s personalities have long been considered “feminine” or softer than men’s. Social scientists remind us that this will not be true in all cases, since characteristics are merely being generalized for gender groups. Women often tend to place greater value upon being humanistic, social, inclusive and acting in cooperative and

collaborative ways (9, 11, 12). Men's traits in contrast are seen as confident, assertive, ambitious and independent (13). These characteristics are theorized to have been transmitted to males and females by virtue of their upbringing. Females often identified closely with their mothers who were largely responsible for caring for others and thus developed softer, more nurturing, characteristics while men took on discipline or business roles more often (11). Girls did not typically participate in the competitive sports that boys did. Some theorists believe "masculine" upbringings created inherent competitive achievement drive within males (11). The difference in women's and men's personalities may or may not have been propelled by their childhoods, but they are certainly apparent to behavioural scientists who study them at great length. Gender differences in leadership styles have also been observed and are conjectured to be the result of personality variations between men and women.

As male workers were predominant in the workforce their leadership styles dominated and were assumed to be the proper and most successful management tactics. Male managers were confident, task-oriented, competitive, objective, decisive and assertive (3). Sometimes male management characteristics are referred to as "transactional" and involving contingent rewards based on compliance (3), whereas female management characteristics were referred to as "transformational" which is more closely related to consideration and motivation (3). As women entered the workforce, and brought with them all the traits and characteristics common to themselves, there was opposition and discrimination against their styles of management. To combat this many of the first female leaders utilized the "masculine" leadership traits discussed above. This move however, was not always well accepted, and women were often stereotyped for

adopting male leadership qualities (13, 14). This form of stereotyping only served to worsen the discrimination against women in management positions. As time passed with more women in the workforce, female managers began to use their own unique traits in leadership.

Ways Women Lead

In more recent times, women have been recognized as exceptional leaders even though this is not yet represented in the percentage of female leaders in large organizations. The cause of this shift was owed to changes in the opinion of what characterizes a great leader. As older and typically “command and control” type leaders leave the work force for retirement, opportunity is made available for fresh thinking leaders, many of whom are women. As this generation of women enters the workforce, it seems they feel less pressured to adopt accepted “masculine” or *transactional* management traits. Their style involves collaborating with subordinates during decision making, being empathetic and self-aware and using other cooperative approaches, such as supportive team building, rather than simply self-interest.

Experts sometimes refer to this new branch of leadership as *interactive leadership*, where interactions with subordinates are valued and regarded as sharing of power, generating trust and motivating workers to achieve their own goals (14). This fresh new way of leading should not be attributed to females alone, since many men have adopted this more emotionally intelligent style as well. Some experts believe that there are no differences between men and women’s styles of leadership, an idea that is disputed by feminist thinkers who contend that if men and women are perceived as similar in

leadership, we will fail to acknowledge the qualities that may contribute to superior female leadership performance (13).

Emotional Intelligence and Leadership

Multiple recent studies show that managers who are emotionally intelligent have higher performance ratings (6, 15). One study which used random selection across countries and included 358 managers used the Emotional Competence Inventory (ECI) multi-rater survey developed on the basis of Goleman and Boyatzis's theories to measure emotional intelligence (15). In this study participants were rated by one supervisor and four subordinates on the basis of their emotional intelligence, and found that superior performing managers and emotional competency was highly correlated. Higher performing leaders were rated stronger in self-awareness, self-management, self-confidence, achievement orientation, initiative, leadership and change catalyst; all of which are consistent with traits distinguished in Goleman's emotional competence Framework (Appendix 2) (6). Although these connections have been made, there is still only limited research in the area (3).

Emotional Intelligence and Women in Leadership

We know that leaders who are emotionally competent tend to have higher management performance, better evaluations from direct supervisors and subordinates; we also know that in some cases, more of these managers tend to be women (11, 12, 15). This finding doesn't directly correlate to women being more effective leaders, only that they sometimes tend to score higher on measures of emotional intelligence (11, 14). Popular author Daniel Goleman disagrees that women have higher emotional intelligence, but acknowledges each gender might be more proficient in particular

emotional intelligence competencies (6). Several hypotheses state that higher emotional intelligence scores could be related to women's socially sensitive nature resulting from biological differences and other differences in early childhood socialization. In some other cases male and female leaders score equally in total measures of emotional intelligence, but consistently score higher in different competencies of emotional intelligence (16). For example, female leaders tended to score higher in empathy, interpersonal relationships and social responsibility, while male leaders scored higher in stress tolerance, impulse control and adaptability (16). It is important to note that although there are some significant differences between men and women in scores of emotional intelligence in the current research, these differences would likely be described by social scientists as small (13). The key message to take from the literature is that women are finally getting the recognition they deserve for high performance leadership, and that new ways of management are emerging based on a combination of emotional competencies.

The good news regarding emotional forms of intelligence is that they can be easily learned, that is if the individual *wants* to learn and therefore it is intentional learning (17). Studies of emotional intelligence training programs show that scores do significantly increase after training. However participants who merely learned the information to do well on the test soon lost the knowledge indicated by follow-up testing (17).

Practical Application: Dietetics

In the dynamic and expanding field of dietetics exceptional leadership is required. Because dietitians work within a healthcare system that is constantly changing, flexible

and understanding leadership capabilities are essential. *Transformational* leadership qualities are valuable in order to bring about effective change. As a predominately female profession, dietitians exemplify transformational leadership (18). As discussed previously, women naturally tend to use transformational styles, supported by natural emotionally intelligent traits. One Canadian dietetic manager describes dietitian's ways of leading as using *exchange relationships* that increase perceived management support (19). Perceived support is important as it yields higher outputs from subordinates, especially in a changing work environment such as the health care field. (19). Emotional intelligence traits of innovation, change management and collaboration are required, and widely used by dietitians to excel as a small but growing profession.

Concluding Thoughts

Emotional intelligence is a new area of study, and is important for developing high performance leaders who are essential for successful management of organizations. Two major theories of emotional intelligence that have emerged are the Ability Model by Mayer & Salovey, and the Mixed Model. The second model has been widely popularized by Daniel Goleman in his best selling books, but has faced criticism from some scientists arguing that emotional intelligence does not meet criteria for a traditional form of intelligence. Most literature on emotional intelligence is related to leadership style, and more recent literature illustrates exceptional emotional intelligence by female leaders. These findings are important for further advancing women in management positions and also to understand how gender roles and childhood socialization might influence an individual's propensity toward elevated emotional intelligence.

Research on men and women's styles of leading do indicate some differences, most notably women using softer *transformational* ways and men using more *transactional* ways, these results only represent *groups* of females and males. Research is mixed, but some women do score higher on measures of emotional intelligence, although men sometimes score higher on specific traits. A more consistent finding is that managers who utilize emotional intelligence competencies in their leadership styles are evaluated highly. We may find managers leading more successfully in the future by adopting emotional intelligence competencies because this form of intelligence can be intentionally learned.

In the predominantly female field of dietetics, emotionally intelligent leader styles have been documented, and used successfully to manage change in an uncertain healthcare environment. The relationships between being female, having high emotional intelligence and being a successful manager are all related, but the degree of association between these three factors is largely unknown. What is known is that emotional intelligence is becoming more established, and also that more women are gaining representation in management. If in fact women do have superior emotional intelligence, it is possible that we may see some degree of feminization in management and leadership fields as women's ways of leading become more accepted.

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