

# **Exploring Emotional Intelligence: A Correlational Study of Follower Attributes**

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*Emotional intelligence is an important characteristic of good leaders and followers. In this work, the relationship between emotional intelligence and the other follower attributes is examined. For the first time, a strong correlation between emotional intelligence and flexibility, tolerance of differing views, and facility for supporting others is demonstrated.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The concept of followership propels our thinking to the next level—from the conventional understanding of leadership as a phenomenon associated with a specific leader toward the idea that leadership is a process of social interaction among followers and leaders. There are key follower characteristics, many of which have not yet been addressed (Antelo, Henderson, & St. Clair, 2010; Baker, Mathis, & Stites-Doe, 2011; Burns, 1978; Henderson, 2008; Henderson and Antelo, 2007; Hollander, 1992; Hur, 2008; Kelley, 1988; Prilipko, Antelo, & Henderson, 2011; Sy, 2010; Uhl-Bien, Riggio, Lowe, & Carsten, 2014), but which fuel, motivate, and activate such processes.

In congruence with Bloom's (1956) research on human development, Antelo, Henderson and St. Clair (2010) agreed that follower characteristics should be based on cognitive and affective domains of human development and learning. The cognitive learning area is represented by observable and intrinsic intellectual abilities such as overall information comprehension, organization of ideas, and evaluation of information and actions. The affective learning domain is represented by one's emotions, attitudes, interest, attention, and awareness towards learning experiences (Anderson et al., 2000; Bloom, 1956). Based on this theoretical framework, Antelo et al. (2010) proposed twelve attributes that characterize followers participating in a leadership process:

1. Facility *for interpersonal relations* concerning relationships between people.
2. Facility *for group relations* and functions concerning the infrastructure or means to form a cohesive group or unit.

3. *Tolerance* concerning acceptance of the differing views of other people.
4. *Conceptual understanding* concerning the ability to use knowledge, reasoning, intuition and perception.
5. Facility for learning and *embracing change* concerning the process of solving a question or puzzle, difficulty, or situation.
6. Facility for *effective communication* concerning accurate exchange of information between or among people.
7. *Reliability* as a group member concerning the ability with the creation of patterns and the capacity to solve organizational problems.
8. Facility for *contribution to the group* concerning the ability to use the imagination to develop new and original ideas or things.
9. *Emotional intelligence* concerning personal attributes that enable people to succeed in life, including self-awareness, empathy, self-confidence, and self-control.
10. Facility for *supporting others* concerning a picture of likeness of someone or something produced either physically or formed in the mind of the beholder.
11. *Flexibility* concerning the ability to change or be changed according to needs or circumstances.
12. *Motivation* for goal accomplishment on a variety of projects concerning the biological, emotional, cognitive, or social forces that activate and direct behavior

## EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

The follower attribute selected for a closer examination in this study is *emotional intelligence* (EI). Salovey and Mayer (1990) defined EI as “the subset of social intelligence that involves the *ability to monitor one’s own and others’ feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and actions*” (p. 189, emphasis in original).

The emotions people experience at their workplace have a direct effect on their attitude toward work (Grandey, 2000; Guy, Newman, & Mastracci, 2008; Hochschild, 1983; Hsieh & Guy, 2009; Muchinsky, 2000). Individuals with high levels of EI are better equipped to use their emotions to assist them with planning and performance of complex intellectual tasks (Alpert & Haber, 1960; Showers, 1988). Emotionally intelligent people are found to be better skilled at coping with life’s predicaments and job-associated stress, which inevitably helps them maintain adequate psychological and physical health (Moon & Hur, 2011; Nikolaou & Tsaousis, 2002; Taylor, 2001). Individuals vary in their abilities to control their emotions when it comes to problem solving. Furthermore, there is a connection between EI and organizational performance (Bar-On, 2000; Goleman, 1995). Persons with frequent mood swings may experience inconsistency with outlining plans or work goals, which hinders their ability to focus and achieve work-related objectives.

Managing emotions effectively allows individuals to enhance their own moods and regulate emotions in themselves and others (Mayer & Gaschke, 1988). Emotionally intelligent followers should be particularly skilled at this process and direct their actions towards specific goals. Individuals high in EI “pay attention to, use, understand, and manage emotions, and these skills serve adaptive functions that potentially benefit themselves and others” (Mayer, Salovey & Caruso, 2008, p. 503).

## CONNECTIONS BETWEEN EI AND OTHER FOLLOWER ATTRIBUTES

While research supports connections between EI and several of the twelve identified attributes, connections between EI and the majority of these attributes have not yet been established in the literature. The confirmed correlations are those between (a) EI and interpersonal relations, (b) EI and three group-work related attributes (facility for group relations and functions, reliability as a group member, and facility for contribution to the group).

## **EI and Interpersonal Relations**

Some researchers document a direct link between EI and interpersonal relations, stating that individuals with higher EI levels exhibit an advanced proficiency in social interactions, close and affectionate relationships, emotional connections with others, and better self-monitoring in social settings (Brackett, Mayer, & Warner, 2004; Kunnanatt, 2004; Schutte et al., 2001).

## **EI and Group-work Related Attributes**

Studies on association between *EI* and *group/team relations* have reported that an individual's EI has a direct benefit on group's effectiveness, which increases collaboration, creative ideas, and successful decisions, resulting in enhanced organizational performance (Druskat & Wolff, 2001; Jordan & Ashkanasy, 2006; Rapisarda, 2002). Individuals with high levels of EI interact more effectively with their colleagues due to an advanced level of attention and coordination (Yuan, Hsu, Shieh, & Li, 2012).

Little attention has been given to a correlation between *EI* and *flexibility*. Yuan, Hsu, Shieh, & Li (2012) affirm that people with high EI are more willing to think outside the box and step out of the boundaries of formally defined job tasks. Christie, Jordan, Troth, & Lawrence (2007) have tested the links between *EI* and *motivation* and concluded that the two are correlated. Connections between EI and the other attributes are minimally supported by literature or not supported at all.

## **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

Several studies have addressed emotional intelligence within organizational and leadership contexts (Cote & Miners, 2006; Kerr, Garvin, & Heaton, 2006; Rosete, 2007; Rosete & Ciarrochi, 2005), but little is known about emotional intelligence as a trait of followers. Since no discussion of EI among followers is found in literature, our study aims to cover this gap. Our purpose is to investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence and the other follower attributes.

## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

The basic quantitative inquiry method for this study followed a correlational design. A sample of 104 participants consisted of employees in business, education, health care, and other service institutions from Belarus and Russia. Descriptive and correlation analyses were used to provide answers to the research question: How does *emotional intelligence* correlate with the other attributes of followers? A principal components analysis established the validity of measurement of the 12 characteristics of followers. Factor scores in the principal components analysis were used to measure levels of each attribute. Correlation procedures revealed relationships between EI and other attributes.

## **INSTRUMENTATION AND DATA COLLECTION**

The *Leadership as a Process: Follower Attribute Inventory: Leader Assessment of Follower, Form 2* (FAI-LAF-2) survey instrument based on follower attributes proposed by Antelo et al. (2010) was translated into Russian. A pilot study of the translated instrument conducted prior to the instrument distribution revealed no changes needed in the instrument. A five-point Likert scale measured a leader's perception of the level of advancement of a follower in each of the 12 attributes. The participants were required to think of a subordinate at work and evaluate his/her follower skills from a leader's perspective. Data were collected through SurveyMonkey®.

## **RESULTS**

A principal components analysis of the 39 item survey converged in 17 iterations and yielded a KMO of .899. The component transformation matrix did not show a major axis across the diagonal. However, all communalities were above .533. Six components were found using the Kaiser Criterion explaining

72% of the variation in the data. Items designed to measure each attribute was then individually entered into principal components analysis, resulting in one component each. All factor loadings were above .33.

Table 1 presents some detail of the analyses along with the Cronbach alpha for each attribute. All Cronbach alphas were .67 or better, which is quite strong considering the number of items in each set. Variance explained by the PCA components was also strong, all above 57%. To give the most thorough representation of the relationships, we will examine the correlations between emotional intelligence and the other attributes using both sums of scores within each component and factor scores. Table 2 shows the Pearson correlations between EI and the other follower attributes as measured by sums of item responses and by factor scores derived from principal component analysis.

**TABLE 1  
PRINCIPAL COMPONENT ANALYSIS OF INDIVIDUAL ATTRIBUTES**

Attribute	Number of items	KMO	% variance explained	Cronbach alpha
Interpersonal Relations	3	.70	70.9	.78
Group Relations	3	.72	76.2	.84
Tolerance	3	.63	60.0	.67
Conceptual Understanding	2	.50	76.3	.68
Embracing Change	3	.68	75.0	.83
Effective Communication	3	.62	68.0	.76
Reliability	4	.80	70.0	.86
Group Contribution	6	.92	76.4	.94
Emotional Intelligence	3	.69	78.2	.86
Supporting Others	3	.68	76.4	.84
Flexibility	4	.74	57.1	.74
Motivation	3	.72	80.0	.85

**TABLE 2  
PEARSON CORRELATIONS BETWEEN EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND OTHER FOLLOWER ATTRIBUTES**

	Emotional Intelligence Correlations as Sums	Emotional Intelligence Correlations as Scores
Interpersonal Relations	.639 <sup>***</sup>	.630 <sup>***</sup>
Group Relations	.590 <sup>***</sup>	.578 <sup>***</sup>
Tolerance	.695 <sup>***</sup>	.702 <sup>***</sup>
Conceptual Understanding	.464 <sup>***</sup>	.449 <sup>***</sup>
Embracing Change	.546 <sup>***</sup>	.545 <sup>***</sup>
Communication	.631 <sup>***</sup>	.632 <sup>***</sup>
Reliability	.627 <sup>***</sup>	.622 <sup>***</sup>
Group Contribution	.711 <sup>***</sup>	.707 <sup>***</sup>
Supporting Others	.707 <sup>***</sup>	.705 <sup>***</sup>
Flexibility	.725 <sup>***</sup>	.723 <sup>***</sup>
Motivation	.557 <sup>***</sup>	.548 <sup>***</sup>

<sup>\*\*\*</sup>  $p < .001$

All correlations were positive significant and moderate to strong. The weakest correlation was between EI and Conceptual Understanding, although still moderate by Cohen's (1988) definition.

Emotional Intelligence is most closely correlated with Flexibility. Such attributes as Tolerance, Group Contribution, and Supporting Others were also strongly correlated with EI, having effect sizes ( $r^2$ ) greater than 49%.

Out of the twelve attributes assessed during the study, Flexibility, Tolerance, Group Contribution, and Supporting Others revealed the strongest correlations with EI. Our study has allowed us to establish correlations between EI and Flexibility, Tolerance and Supporting Others for the first time, as these connections have not been previously supported in the literature, and has confirmed an earlier reported connection between EI and Group Contribution.

## DISCUSSION

Cultural analysis of Russia and Belarus based on Hofstede's (1980) model of national culture facilitates the interpretation of the strong correlations between EI and Flexibility as well as EI and Tolerance that we found. Table 3 shows five dimensions of Hofstede's cultural model (Gannon & Pillai, 2010; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; Robbins & Judge, 2009) for Belarus and Russia (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). The culture in Russia and Belarus is identified as one with a low tolerance for uncertainty, in which we would not expect a strong measure of Flexibility or Tolerance according to national characteristics. Indeed, the advancement levels of flexibility and tolerance demonstrated by the survey participants were among the lowest.

The intriguing fact is that we received a strong correlation between EI and Group Contribution and a much weaker correlation between EI and Group Relations, Interpersonal Relations, and Communication. Cultural peculiarities of Russia and Belarus facilitate the interpretation of this phenomenon as the communication factor in these countries is not as advanced as the work performance factor. Russia/Belarus share a contact culture, which is expressed by intense eye contact, frequent touching and little physical distance (Andersen, 1994), but individuals are not characterized as excellent communicators. On the opposite, Russians have been described as serious and unexpressive, indifferent and discourteous. This gloomy façade is a stereotypical cultural behavior, masking "a raw humanness that could not be more real" (Gannon & Pillai, 2010, p. 422). Communication skills are not encouraged in these countries as talkativeness is viewed to be a negative trait rather than a sign of social adaptability. Numerous cultural sayings are based on the belief that silence is a virtue and loquaciousness is an indicator of lack of intelligence: "Talk is cheap, silence is golden," "A word spoken is past recalling," "First think then speak" (Jarv, 1999; Russian Proverbs and Sayings, 2015).

Ability to support others and contribute to the group, on the other hand, is highly associated with EI in this collectivist society. People in these two countries thrive on close friends-and-family connections that aid them through the unpredictability and harshness of the lifestyle. The origin of this can be explained by the necessity to survive in severe conditions where people have historically experienced the need to work closely together and support each other. "A strong in-group orientation developed in which people expressed emotions openly and automatically helped others," (Gannon & Pillai, 2010, p. 425) creating a culture of strong community bonds and sharing.

The weakest correlation established in the study is a correlation between EI and Conceptual Understanding. This result is quite expected since such contrasting functions as the ability to control and express emotions and conceptual processing are associated with different parts of the brain. According to the theory of left- or right-brain dominance, the right hemisphere controls expressing and understanding emotions and the left hemisphere regulates critical thinking, logic and reasoning (Pfister & Bohm, 2008; Springer & Deutsch, 1998).

**TABLE 3**  
**DIMENSIONS AND INDEXES OF HOFSTEDÉ'S MODEL OF NATIONAL CULTURES**  
**APPLIED TO RUSSIA AND BELARUS**

Explanation of Dimension	Russia/Belarus
The <i>power distance index</i> (PDI) measures the degree to which the less powerful layer within a country accepts unequal distribution of power (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005).	93, high power distance
The <i>individualism index</i> (IDV) measures the position of a society between the two polar ends individualism and collectivism. Individualism characterizes the lifestyle in which each individual is concerned about his personal needs and his immediate family. Collectivism, on the opposite, represents a tight social net, in which families and groups stay closely supportive and connected (Gannon & Pillai, 2010; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005).	39, collectivist
The <i>masculinity index</i> (MAS) measures the degree of assertiveness within a society. A high masculinity index indicates that gender roles are clearly distinguished and the male role is dominant. The masculine role is expected to be assertive and focused on material component of life. The feminine role is oriented towards overall quality of life (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005).	36, more feminine
The <i>uncertainty avoidance index</i> (UAI) measures the degree to which a society has low or increased level of tolerance towards ambiguity. Cultures with low levels of uncertainty avoidance are more prepared to take risks and accept change (Robbins & Judge, 2009).	95, high uncertainty avoidance
The <i>long-term orientation index</i> (LTO) measures the position of a society towards long- and short-term orientation. "Long-term orientation stands for fostering of virtues oriented toward future rewards – in particular, perseverance and thrift. Its opposite pole, short-term orientation, stands for the fostering of virtues related to the past and present – in particular, respect for traditions, preservation of 'face,' and fulfilling social obligations." (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, p. 210).	81, long-term orientation

### STUDY LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Our study was conducted in the collectivistic countries, which may be regarded as a limitation of the study. Studies conducted within other societies may or may not yield similar results. Comparison of followership attributes and their relationships to one another within differing cultures will broaden our understanding of the dynamics between leaders and followers in the global arena. Are these relationships different in various cultures? For example, Hofstede (1980) and others (Gannon & Pillai, 2010; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; Hofstede et al., 2010; Robbins & Judge, 2009) have discussed the wide range of positions between leaders and followers in cultures with high and low power-distance dimensions. In a low power-distance culture, would we expect the follower to behave differently? Would it be expected, or even acceptable, for a follower to take the initiative in a group task? Would this be considered the behavior of an individual with high emotional intelligence? Answers to these and related questions could hold potential benefit for the overall understanding of followership in the multicultural sense. Furthermore, significant gaps in knowledge remain in such fields as the impact of culture on theories of EI (Mayer et al., 2008) as well as on levels of EI among followers with regards to their gender, age, work experience, and national origin.

## CONCLUSIONS

Emotional intelligence is an important attribute of followers as it influences their attitudes toward work-related tasks, makes a direct impact on the overall job performance, and has a critical effect on their physiological and psychological health. This study closely examined emotional intelligence as one of the twelve follower attributes. The instrumentation designed to measure the perceived level of advancement in each attribute was administered to 104 participants from Russia and Belarus who were asked to evaluate follower skills from a leader's perspective. Strong correlations were found between Emotional Intelligence and four other follower attributes: Flexibility, Tolerance, Group Contribution, and Supporting Others. For the first time, correlations were established between EI and Flexibility as well as Tolerance and Supporting Others. Our study revealed a strong correlation between EI and Group Contribution and a much weaker correlation between EI and Group Relations, Interpersonal Relations, and Communication. A correlation between EI and Conceptual Understanding was found to be the weakest. An earlier reported link between EI and Group Contribution was confirmed. Hofstede's model of national culture was used to interpret the results of the study.

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