THE ROLE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

AMONG SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST LEADERS

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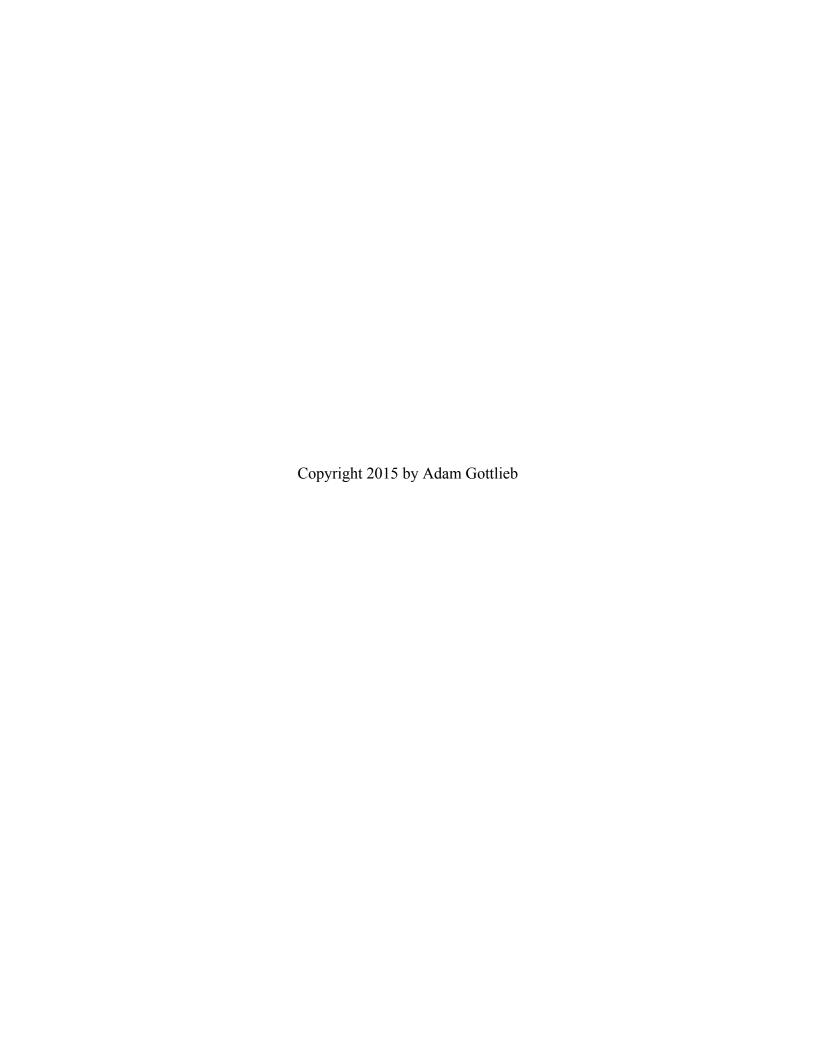
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Abstract

The importance of emotional intelligence (EI) has been examined in many different contexts, such as education, health, personal relationships, social adjustment, and work. Research also confirms the unique role that emotional intelligence plays in effective leadership. The expanding role of the school psychologist, specifically in the area of systems level programming and change, has created a new set of challenges and opportunities and, subsequently, the need for strong leadership skills. This exploratory study investigated the relationship between EI, school psychology effectiveness, and leadership emergence. Using the critical incident technique, the researcher interviewed six school psychologists who were nominated by others as highly effective, emotionally intelligent leaders. The goals of the interviews were to better understand how the school psychologists used emotional intelligence abilities to deal with challenging situations, and to identify how emotional intelligence contributed to their emergence as leaders. One outcome of the study is that the school psychologists managed stressful and emotionally charged incidents by skillfully combining the four core abilities included in the Mayer-Salovey model of emotional intelligence. In addition, the interviews suggested that emotional intelligence alone does not make leaders; rather, it is the use of emotional intelligence in the service of values, particularly a deep caring and concern for others and for the institution's mission, that produces leaders. One other idea that emerged from the study is that EI seems to be important not only during challenging situations; it also helped these school psychologists become respected leaders because of the way they consistently used and modeled emotional intelligence during more routine interactions. A practical implication suggested by the study is that students in school psychology programs would benefit from more explicit training in how to use emotional intelligence in dealing with interpersonal and organizational challenges. This

 training would not only prepare them to deal with those challenges; it also would prime them to

be future school psychologist leaders.

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The Role of Emotional Intelligence Among School Psychologist Leaders

**Introduction**

Interest in emotional intelligence (EI) has grown during the last two decades. EI has been examined in a variety of contexts including education, health, personal relationships, social adjustment, and work. A growing body of research also confirms the unique role that emotional intelligence plays in effective leadership. As Cherniss (2006) comments, "Whether it is charting a grand vision for the future, mediating among diverse stakeholders, or providing corrective feedback to a struggling subordinate, effective leaders must draw on the abilities associated with emotional intelligence" (p.137). The field of school psychology is changing, as a result of which school psychologists increasingly find themselves involved in activities impacting both the micro and larger systems levels. This expanding role creates opportunities for school psychologists to assume new and important leadership roles.

The purpose of this exploratory research is to increase our understanding of how a sample of effective school psychology leaders used emotional intelligence to accomplish important goals. Participants in this study were nominated based on meeting criteria indicating that they were recognized as innovative school psychology leaders in their organizations, and that they effectively use emotions and EI to lead other members of the organization. Using a critical incident interview technique, this study explores how leaders deal with emotion in their day-to-day work and how they use EI to increase their leadership effectiveness.

**Literature Review**

**Emotional Intelligence**

Interest in the area of Emotional Intelligence (EI) was originally generated by anecdotal evidence suggesting that cognitive ability alone was not sufficient in explaining success in life

(Cherniss, 2010). While people may score high on standardized intelligence tests, this does not necessarily translate into success in areas of life such as social-relations and self-regulation. Although some empirical research suggests that good leaders are smart, the actual relationship between general mental ability and leadership effectiveness is not very strong (Cherniss, 2006). In fact, clinical experience often suggests that individuals may score well above average on traditional measures of intellect, yet be significantly deficient in areas such as self-regulation and social awareness (Cherniss, 2010). A 2004 meta-analysis found that "the relationship between intelligence and leadership is considerably lower than previously thought," with a corrected correlation coefficient of only 0.27 (Judge, Colbert, & Ilies, 2004, p. 542).

There are three main premises underlying the concept of EI: First, is that emotions play an important role in life. Second, is that individuals differ in their ability to perceive, understand, use, and manage emotions. The third premise is that EI abilities contribute to performance outcomes in different settings, including the workplace. (Cherniss, 2010))

There are several definitions of EI based on the leading EI models in the field. Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso (2000) define EI as ''the ability to perceive and express emotion, assimilate emotion in thought, understand and reason with emotion, and regulate emotion in the self and others'' (p.396). Goleman (2001) has suggested that emotional intelligence encompasses "the abilities to recognize and regulate emotions in ourselves and others" (p.14). Bar-On (Bar-On, Handley, & Fund, 2005) defined EI as "A cross-section of emotional and social competencies that determine how well we understand and express ourselves, understand and relate with others, and cope with daily demands and pressures" (p.5). Putting these definitions together, EI involves *the ability to perceive, understand, and manage emotions in one's self and others.*

In order to facilitate research in the area of EI there are three major issues to clarify. The

first is to make the distinction between the construct of "emotional intelligence" (EI) and the construct referred to as "emotional and social competence" (ESC). The second issue involves evaluating the existing tools used to measure EI and ESC. The third issue relates to understanding the significance that EI has for outcomes in the workplace and how it impacts leadership effectiveness (Cherniss, 2010).

There are currently four main models dominating the field of EI, each of which is associated with an ability (EI) approach or with a competency (ESC) approach. For our discussion, an "EI" model can be considered one focused on "abilities," in that it measures an individual's potential in the area of EI, much like traditional cognitive tests such as the Wechsler Scales assess intellectual potential. On the other hand, "ESC" refers to an individual's emotional and social "competencies," and the extent to which an individual applies these EI related abilities in real world situations.

Mayer and Salovey (1997) developed a model of EI in an effort to establish a new distinct theory of intelligence. Their approach focuses on core mental abilities that involve the processing of emotional information, yet these abilities remain distinct from other cognitive abilities or personality traits. The four components of their model include the ability to perceive emotions, the ability to use emotions to facilitate thought, the ability to understand emotions, and the ability to manage emotions (Mayer, Roberts, & Barsade, 2008). This model is associated with the *Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test* (MSCEIT) an ability test that measures the respondent's ability to deal with objective and impersonal scenarios, such as having the test-taker rate the emotional expressions on a number of faces.

Bar-On (1988) developed a model of ESC, which he called "emotional and social intelligence." The goal of his research was to define the traits, characteristics and skills that help

people adapt to the emotional and social demands of life. Bar-On categorized these skills into the following personal qualities: the ability to be aware of, understand, and express oneself; the ability to be aware of, understand, and relate to others; the ability to deal with strong emotions and control one's impulses; and the ability to adapt to change and to solve problems of a personal or social nature. The five main components comprising Bar-On's model are: intrapersonal skills, interpersonal skills, adaptability, stress management, and general mood (Bar-On, 1997, 2006). *The Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory* (EQ-i) is a self-report measure used to assess the emotional, personal, social, and survival components of intelligence (Bar-On, 2000).

Trait Emotional Intelligence, the most recent model in the area of EI follows the ESC approach and was designed to include many personal qualities included in earlier models (Petrides, Pita, & Kokkinaki, 2007). The developers used statistical analysis to identify and include all facets of personality that are related to affect, claiming that EI is a personality trait (Petrides et al., 2007). The four components to this model are: well-being (self confidence, happiness, and optimism), sociability (social competence, assertiveness, and emotion management of others), self-control (stress management, emotion regulation, and low impulsiveness), and emotionality (emotion expression, and empathy) (Petrides et al., 2007). A popular measure associated with this model is the *Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire* (TEIQue), a self-report measure used to assess all 15 aspects of trait emotional intelligence (Petrides et al., 2007).

An additional model of ESC is based on the work of Boyatzis and Goleman (Boyatzis & Sala, 2004). Their model was inspired by Mayer and Salovey, but they also included social and emotional competencies that are linked to outstanding performance in the work place. Their

model consists of specific competencies organized into four main groups: self-awareness, self-management, social-awareness, and relationship management. Associated with this model is the Emotional and Social Competence Inventory (ESCI), a multi-rater assessment that measures how these personal qualities are manifested in the work setting.

There are weaknesses inherent in many of the current measures of EI.  One of the distinct limitations to self-report measures of EI is that people are often poor judges of their own abilities, especially when those abilities are highly valued.  This is a concerning limitation particularly when measuring emotional abilities, since the more lacking a person is in EI, the more suspect will be their judgments regarding these abilities (Cherniss, 2010).  A promising alternative to self-report measures is the multirater or ''360 degree'' assessment.  In addition to including a self-report, the multirater assessment also includes evaluative feedback provided by members of an employee's immediate work circle. Multirater measures such as the *Emotional Competence Inventory* (ECI), the *Emotional and Social Competence Inventory* (ESCI), or the *Genos Emotional Intelligence Inventory* (Genos EI) all require others to rate the person rather than relying solely on the person's self-evaluation (Boyatzis & Sala, 2004; Palmer, Stough, Hamer, & Gignac, 2009).  Multirater assessments can also be biased, but by increasing the number and variety among those rating an individual (boss, peers, subordinates, and customers), the bias can be reduced.  Multirater assessments have limitations such as being more complex and expensive than either performance tests or self-report inventories, and the results can be distorted by the politics of the social settings in which it occurs (Cherniss, 2010).

Most measures of EI and ESC have an additional limitation: They ignore the role of context (Cherniss, 2010). As a result, these tests may be ineffective at measuring how people actually behave in real-life situations.  Psychologists have been aware of these limitations for

decades, and have developed alternative strategies such as assessment centers (Lievens & Klimoski, 2001) and behavioral event interviews (McClelland, 1998). Although these alternatives can be challenging to develop and use, Spector and Johnson (2006) have suggested some promising approaches that could be utilized to assess some of the abilities associated with EI. For example, role-play exercises could be used to test how well a person is able to comfort someone who is upset. When considering the accurate measure of EI, it is important to consider the dynamic and transient nature of feelings. Typically, the research designs capable of accommodating such dynamism are event-based experimental, daily diary studies, experience sampling methods, qualitative studies and critical incident techniques. These designs measure moods and emotions very close to their occurrence thus reducing the probability of retrospective biases (Robinson & Clore, 2002)

Research highlights the importance of EI as a predictor of performance in a number of important domains such as academic performance, job performance, negotiation, leadership, emotional labor, trust, work–family conflict, and stress (Ashkanasy & Daus, 2002; Fulmer & Barry, 2004; Humphrey, 2002, 2006; Humphrey, Pollack, & Hawver, 2008; Jordan, Ashkanasy, & Hartel, 2002). The results of a recent meta-analysis (O'Boyle, Humphrey, Pollack, Hawver, & Story, 2011) support the work of several researchers who have argued that EI is an important predictor of work-related outcomes, and a unique predictor of job performance over and above personality characteristics and cognitive intelligence (Ashkanasy & Daus, 2005; Brackett & Mayer, 2003; Brackett, Mayer, & Warner, 2004; Daus & Ashkanasy, 2005; Dulewicz & Higgs, 2000; Dulewicz, Higgs, & Slaski, 2003; Fox & Spector, 2000; Law, Wong, & Song, 2004). From the outset it is important to clarify that although the term "emotional intelligence" (EI) is used in relation to performance outcomes, in most cases we are actually discussing "emotional

and social competencies" (ESC).

EI may be an especially important predictor of effective performance in the service industry, in which workers come into frequent contact with consumers and customers. Sy, Tram, and O'Hara (2006) and Bono, Foldes, Vinson, and Muros (2007) conducted studies in organizations such as the food industry, and found that employee job satisfaction and ability to maintain positive moods were related to the EI of their managers or "leaders." EI is especially important in predicting job performance when "emotional labor" is a major component of the job. Emotional labor occurs when employees must alter their emotional expressions in order to meet the display rules of the organization (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Diefendorff, Croyle, & Gosserand, 2005; Hochschild, 1979; Pugh, 2001; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1990). Emotional labor is increasingly important as the service industry grows and the manufacturing sector has declined (Bono & Vey, 2007). A meta-analysis by Joseph and Newman (2010) found that EI was a better predictor of performance on jobs that required emotional labor, more than with overall jobs. Other core EI abilities related to job performance include the recognition of emotions in one's self and in others, and the ability to regulate one's emotions, both of which contribute to effective social interactions. Even in highly cognitive settings such as universities, research suggests that EI predicts more effective performance outcomes and leadership ratings in collaborative group tasks, whereas cognitive ability was a better predictor of individual tasks (Offermann, Bailey, Vasilopoulos, Seal, & Sass, 2004).

Although there is important data supporting the link between EI and work-related performance, these positive findings should be viewed with caution. One reason is that the relationship between EI and performance tends to be modest, especially when personality traits and cognitive ability are partialled out. Furthermore, some of the studies have been based on

participants' behavior in simulations, rather than in real-life situations.  For field studies, in

which performance feedback was provided by supervisor ratings, the validity could also be

questioned (Cherniss, 2010).  In addition, many of the studies that reported positive findings

involved mixed or inconsistent findings.  For example, some dimensions of EI predicted

performance, while others did not, or a dimension of EI predicted performance in one study,

while a different dimension predicted it in a separate study.  These inconsistencies likely reflect

the fact that the role of context has been ignored, and the link between EI and performance will

vary based on such factors as the type of job, the specific situation, and the kind of people

involved in these situations (Cherniss, 2010).

**Emotional Intelligence and Leadership Effectiveness**

The role of emotion has generally been underemphasized in the literature on leadership.

Feelings have been either ignored or viewed as obstacles to rationality and effective decision-

making (Albrow, 1992).  A growing body of research has, however, been exploring the

important role that emotions play in organizational affairs, suggesting that feelings play a central

role in the leadership process (Fineman, 1993; Forgas, 1995).  The importance of EI becomes

clearer when considering the nature of leadership. For instance, a number of writers have

proposed that leadership ultimately is about the ability to influence others (Zaccaro, 2002). The

extent to which a leader is influential appears to depend significantly upon the way in which the

leader manages his or her emotions and the emotions of the group members.  Effective leaders

are not coldly rational and unemotional, but understand when the expression of motivation is

adaptive, and when it needs to be kept in check.  To highlight the relationship between EI and

leadership, Cherniss (2006), paraphrases Aristotle saying that the effective leader is angry with

the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way. Such a leader has a high degree of emotional intelligence.

There are numerous ways in which EI is linked to effective leadership. For example, to help with the development of a collective set of organizational goals, the leader may use emotions to enhance information processing, a skill needed when leading an organization through uncertainty and ambiguity. Positive mood within a leader is linked to increased creativity (Isen, 1987) and the ability to create a compelling vision to counter existing conditions. A leader that accurately appraises followers' and group members' emotions has important knowledge regarding the contributions to these feelings, and is more likely to successfully influence followers' receptivity to the leader's goals. The effective leader needs to make sure that others are aware of the problems and issues of an organization, yet at the same time foster enthusiasm in the followers' optimism and belief that they can contribute to the solution. In order for a leader to generate and maintain excitement, he or she must be able to anticipate how the followers will react to changes or innovations, and effectively manage the emotional reactions aroused by these changes. The leader also needs to be able to distinguish between sincere and fake enthusiasm, and when needed, work to instill real feelings of excitement and enthusiasm (George, 2000). When leaders have knowledge of their own emotions and can manage them, they may be better able to generate a range of creative solutions, and avoid rigid and restricted decision-making.

Emotional intelligence and leadership effectiveness is also important when considering the issue of the organizational identity and culture. As suggested by Trice and Beyer (1993), organizational identity resides in ideologies that are "shared, relatively coherent interrelated sets of emotionally charged beliefs, values, and norms that bind some people together and help them

make sense of their worlds" (p.33). As a result of an organizational culture being "emotionally charged," the management of this culture is, in a sense, the management of emotions (Van Maanen & Kunda, 1989). An effective leader also needs to be able to mediate between individuals or groups in conflict. A leader's ability to effectively manage conflict is influenced by his or her ability to sense when members care about an issue, can identify underlying concerns, and manage the group members' emotions in a way that leads to constructive problem solving and a resolution of differences (Cherniss, 2010). Effective leaders also often work in highly stressful settings, and research suggests that under these conditions there is a reduction in one's ability to handle information. Thus, the higher the stress, the less information one can manage in their brain. As Chemers (2002) points out, "By managing anxiety, maintaining a positive attitude, and successfully coping with stress, leaders and followers are more able to make use of the resources of knowledge and skill that they possess" (p.152).

　　　Emotional intelligence is clearly important when considering some of the routine responsibilities of leaders and supervisors. For example, consider the potentially volatile and sensitive nature of a leader coaching a subordinate, or a supervisor providing corrective feedback to a supervisee (Cherniss, 2010). Success in these types of tasks requires an awareness and management of one's own anxiety, as well as the empathy and knowledge of the other's emotions in order to provide individualized and effective feedback and guidance (Chemers, 2002). Awareness and management of one's own emotions is especially important for effective leadership (Cherniss, 2010). For example, it is important for effective leaders to recognize and capitalize on personal strengths, and take steps to compensate for areas of weakness (Sternberg, 2002). To illustrate this idea Cherniss (2010) brings an example of two managers who both have a weakness in producing flow chart projects. Each manager has a subordinate skilled at flow

charts.  One manager asks his subordinate for help, while the other does it himself, in order not to look bad.  One manager is ultimately promoted while the other eventually loses his job.  Thus, whether it is charting a grand vision for the future, mediating among diverse stakeholders, or providing corrective feedback to a struggling subordinate, leaders must draw on the abilities associated with emotional intelligence. As Cherniss concludes (2006), "There are few aspects of leadership that do not depend on emotional intelligence in one way or another" (p.138).

During the last two decades, a growing body of empirical research has documented the link between EI and leadership success (Cherniss & Boyatzis, 2014). In one empirical study, researchers found that EI was correlated with ratings of achieved business outcomes and effective personal behavior in a group of executives employed by a large public service company (Rosete & Ciarrochi, 2005). Similar research found that success among sales leaders was a function of behaviors associated with EI and social intelligence (SI), and that these skills had a greater impact than personality and cognitive intelligence (Boyatzis, Massa, & Good, 2012). Another study, using a multi-rater measure of EI (the Swinburne University Emotional Intelligence Test), found that EI scores correlated with annual performance appraisals for a group of leaders working in a division of a global manufacturing company (Semadar, Robins, & Ferris, 2006).  A study of 100 managers of Beefeater restaurants in the United Kingdom found that emotional and social intelligence of managers predicted an annual profit increase, as well as guest satisfaction (Bar-On, 2004).

Harms and Credé (2010) conducted a meta-analytic study to establish to what extent EI is related specifically to behaviors associated with Transformational and Transactional Leadership. Transformational Leadership is one of the most widely researched paradigms in the leadership field and has shown substantial validity for predicting a number of outcomes including leader

performance and effectiveness ratings in addition to follower satisfaction and motivation (Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Sashkin, 2004). Transactional Leadership, an additional popular and researched model assesses to what extent the leader sets out clear goals and expectations, rewards followers for working toward them, and how much a leader actively monitors followers for mistakes and tries to correct them**.**

Harms and Credé (2010) included in their meta-analysis studies that reported data from explicit measures of EI, such as Mayer-Salovey-Caruso's MSCEIT (2002) and Bar-On's EQi (1997), and the final database was comprised of correlations derived from 62 independent samples of studies, representing data from 7,145 leaders.  This meta-analysis led Harms and Credé to conclude that EI was positively related to various dimensions of transformational and transactional leadership.  They found that the use of trait based assessments, such as Bar-On's EQi had higher levels of predictive validity than ability-based assessment measures, such as the MSCEIT.  One caveat when considering this meta-analysis is the heavy use of ability based measures such as the MSCEIT to assess the correlation between EI and leadership, since ability and knowledge tests do not provide a good assessment of a person's actual ability (Cherniss, 2006). As Spector and Johnson (2006) noted, "…one might understand that smiling at someone can be an effective means of producing a positive emotional reaction, but recognizing in a live encounter the moment to smile and doing so in a way that does not seem false or insincere may well be a different ability..." (p.335).  Although the authors concluded that claims that EI is at the core of transformational leadership are exaggerated, the study did demonstrate that "EI may contribute to successful leadership at some level" (Harms & Crede, 2010, p.13).

The existing body of research, thus, suggests a significant link between EI and leadership effectiveness.  Furthermore, this relationship has been established using different measures of EI

including self-report measures, multi-rater assessments, ability measures, and objective measures such as annual profits and student retention rates in college. While not all studies or meta-analyses definitively support the claim that elevated EI contributes to leadership effectiveness, the positive studies far outweigh the negative ones in number and methodological quality. When all of the research is considered together, the evidence supports the claim that emotional intelligence is a significant factor in leadership effectiveness (Cherniss, 2006).

**Emotional Intelligence, Leadership, and Effective School Psychologists**

Although the link between emotional intelligence, leadership, and school psychologist effectiveness has not been explicitly researched, there is a solid rationale to make this connection. The field of school psychology is changing; school psychologists increasingly find themselves involved in activities impacting both the micro and larger systems levels.  This role expansion, and the subsequent responsibilities generated, creates opportunities for school psychologists to take on leadership roles.  School psychology organizations, such as the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) have increasingly identified "leadership" as a core theme in their conferences and journals (Bass, 2013; Smith, 2012).

NASP has identified "leadership" as an increasingly valuable theme of professional development.  The theme outlined by the 2012 NASP president, Amy Smith, was "Building Leaders," and during that year, seven of the eight "president's messages" of NASP's *Communiqué* newspaper had the term "leader" or "leadership" in its title (Smith, 2012).  The guiding principles articulated by the current 2013 NASP president are "Leadership, Critical Skills, and Advocacy," and to date, three of the five president's messages have focused on leadership (Bass, 2013 & 2014).  The recent 2012 *Conference of the Future of School Psychology* stated as its mission, "…to ensure children's future academic success and mental

health through the promotion of leadership, critical skills, and advocacy"
(http://www.indiana.edu/~futures/f12_mission.html, 2012).  The introduction to one of the
webinars in this conference stated "leadership is continuing to emerge as a vital element in
school improvement efforts. Research has shown that, second only to teaching, leadership is a
key influence on student success" (http://www.indiana.edu/~futures/f12_leadership.html?tab=1,
2012).  Some of the specific issues explored in the webinar were, "Promoting a culture of
leadership within the field of school psychology," and "Fostering the development and
implementation of leadership skills within the field of school psychology"
(http://www.indiana.edu/~futures/f12_leadership.html?tab=1, 2012).

Amy Smith (2012) highlights some of the reasons for the focus on leadership within the
field of school psychology.  In her involvement with many different schools and districts, Smith
observed that the most consistent element for successful schools was strong leadership.  School
psychologists, contends Smith (2012), tend to focus on "honing our skills in the tools of the
trade;" (p.2) however, by also focusing on the development of leadership skills, the school
psychologist will increase his or her impact on the populations served.  The subsequent NASP
president, Sally Baas (2013) began to concretize and apply the focus on leadership by
challenging "…state and regional NASP leaders to examine the way they lead by using the Jim
Kouzes and Barry Posner leadership model" (p.2). This model "includes demonstrating by
example; creating a succinct, shared vision; challenging the way we do things; enabling others to
participate in the work; and encouraging the individuals with whom we work" (Bass, 2013 p.2).

The keynote speaker at the 2012 futures conference, Robert Horner, identified three
changes in school systems and education that are thrusting the school psychologist into new
domains.  Horner claims that these new roles have come about due to the growing centrality of

multi-tiered systems of support, such as Positive Behavior Interventions & Supports (PBIS) programs, the adherence to evidence-based practices, and implementation science in public school settings (Horner, 2012). Given the training background and skill-sets of school psychologists, they are uniquely positioned to help schools, teams, and districts respond effectively to these emerging themes. Contributing effectively to these domains, claims Horner, depends on strong leadership.

In her webinar presentation for the futures conference, Jane Conoley used Jim Collins' five-tiered model of leadership as a framework to explore the various leadership opportunities for school psychologists (Conoley, 2012). The spectrum of leadership, according to Collins, ranges from the "highly capable individual" to the "executive" level. In addition to more expected school psychology activities and competencies such as measurement and needs assessment, Conoley also discussed some important emerging or underemphasized skill-sets related to school psychology and leadership such as marketing, relationship management, management buy-in, and perception analysis. Being an exemplary leader as a school psychologist, according to Conoley, requires possessing excellent group process skills, and the ability to organize and motivate individuals and groups.

Some of the leaders in the area of social and emotional learning (SEL) have made the link between system-wide SEL program implementation and specific skills within the transformational leadership model (Elias, O'Brien, & Weissberg, 2006). Since school psychologists are often at the forefront of leading school-wide SEL initiatives, a deeper understanding of the role of EI and leadership increases in importance.

All subcomponents of the "how" of leadership only have value when they are in the service of a compelling vision. As Conoley outlines in her webinar (2012), the desired outcomes

of effective leadership include academic and social and emotional success for every child; a

commitment to continuous learning for every staff member; and schools, families, and

communities working in partnership for child welfare and success.

**Emotional Intelligence, Leadership, and Effective School Psychologists: Personal**

**Reflections**

On a personal level, the importance of EI is evident when I reflect on the behaviors and

attitudes of the school psychologists that supervised me during my first several years working as

a school psychologist in a private Manhattan school. What were the specific behaviors, skills,

and attitudes that these school psychologists possessed that made them such effective leaders?

What did they do in order to establish and maintain, trusting, influential and valuable

consultative relationships ranging from parents and teachers, to senior administrators?  Finally,

what role did EI play in their leadership effectiveness?

Reflecting on the supervision they provided, and on my observations of them in various

settings, there are a number of skills and attitudes that highlight their leadership roles, as well as

their use of EI as effective leaders. For example, they demonstrated through their behavior, and

explicitly taught, that effective school psychologists are constantly modeling behaviors for others

and acting as exemplars of desirable professional conduct. The ability to "stay in role"

consistently and in all professional situations, whether those situations are charged with

emotional intensity, or whether they appear to be more "casual" interactions, requires a high

level of self-awareness and an ability to manage emotions.

The management of emotions, both of their own and of team members was often

employed during child study team meetings in which frustrated, anxious, and angry teachers

contagiously injected these emotions into the group atmosphere.  Repeatedly, it was the school

psychologist who had the knowledge of group process, leadership skills, and the EI to manage the emotions of participants, and establish discussions that were productive and purposeful. At times a rare expression of directed anger was helpful in motivating action, creating a healthy dose of discomfort, and encouraging reflection. I also observed how the ability to perceive and regulate emotions enabled the school psychologist to generate creative solutions, offer unique insights, and at times inspire others to think in new ways by simply asking a powerful question in the right way, and at the right time.

These school psychologists also introduced innovations that questioned, and ultimately impacted the prevailing culture and beliefs of the organization. For example, one school psychologist worked to change an atmosphere of "blame" and a prevalent attitude that academically and behaviorally challenging students be "counseled out" of the school. He bravely promoted his vision of inclusion, collaboration, and the belief that the school needs to create a meaningful learning experience for all students, rather than forcing them to comply with "the curriculum." While this novel approach was refreshing, empowering, and celebrated by many, it also aroused anger and discomfort among others. Without a doubt, the ability to inspire others with a compelling vision, and to navigate the emotions aroused through the introduction of change, requires a high level of EI. During my final year at this school the term "leader" was used to describe my organizational presence, and it was at this point that I realized the extent to which I had begun to internalize and apply the guidance and supervision of these school psychologists. Following a meeting I facilitated including faculty and administration, the head of the elementary division turned to me, and in a tone of pride said, "Look how much you've grown…you've become a leader and a force."

**Summary**

Emotional Intelligence (EI) and the study of emotion has become an increasingly important area of research over the past two decades.  EI has been shown to be a unique predictor and contributor to important performance outcomes in a range of settings.  The study of EI and its relationship to work related outcomes are particularly important as the service industry, more than the manufacturing sector, have become more central.  One important area of research is the role of EI in leadership effectiveness.  In contrast to long held beliefs that emotions are an obstacle to core leadership behaviors, research has been revealing the important role emotions play in effective leadership.  Abilities such as understanding emotions, expressing emotions, and regulating emotions in the self and others have been shown to be vital for effective leadership.  The importance of leadership skills for school psychologists has also become prominent.  In fact, the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), the leading school psychology organization, has placed leadership at the forefront of its initiatives over the past two years.

Anecdotally, the link between EI, leadership, and school psychologist effectiveness makes sense, as was outlined in the previous section.  This relationship, however, has not been researched in a systematic or in-depth manner.  This study is a preliminary investigation of how effective school psychologists rely on and use EI abilities to lead others.

The Mayer-Salovey abilities model of EI will be the theoretical framework for this study. There are four main abilities that comprise this model of EI: The ability to perceive emotions, the ability to use emotions to facilitate thought, the ability to understand emotions, and the ability to manage emotions (Mayer, et al., 2008).  There are several reasons for choosing this model.  First, the Mayer-Salovey definition of EI is a foundation for other popular models, all of which

generally accept this definition of EI.  The second reason for using the Mayer-Salovey model is that it is viewed as the purest and most valid one by most researchers.  The other models are seen as combining EI with other aspects of personality or intelligence (Ashkanasy & Daus, 2005; Cherniss, 2010).  The third reason is that an existing study by my dissertation chair is currently investigating the role of EI among leaders in other fields, and is using the Mayer-Salovey model of EI.  Sharing a model with this study will help identify similarities and differences between leadership and EI in varying roles and organizational contexts.  Using the same model also promotes meaningful discussions due a common language and definition of concepts.

## Method

### Subject Population and Recruitment

The participants in this study were all trained as school psychologists.  Some were in traditional school psychology roles, and others had assumed administrative roles related to their original school psychology training.  Details about their roles and responsibilities can be found in Table 1.  All participants have met the criteria fitting the purpose of this study, as they were recognized as leaders, formal or informal, in their educational organizations, and were perceived as possessing a high level of emotional intelligence (i.e. effective at using and managing their own and others' emotions).

These participants were recruited through a nomination process.  There were three nominators who recommended the school psychologist.  Two nominators were from the author's professional network, and the other nominator was the dissertation investigator.  All nominators had sufficient exposure to a range of school psychologists; two of the nominators were professors in a graduate school psychology program, supervised school psychology interns, and one of them was the internship coordinator for the program.  The dissertation investigator, the

third nominator, had worked as a school psychologist for six years prior to beginning the

research, and had worked with several different school psychologists during his career.

**Participants**

Seven individuals were interviewed for this exploratory study. Since the first interview

was considered a training opportunity for the investigator, this interview was not included. All

six participants were doctoral level school psychologists, and were included in the study because

they were perceived by the members of the nominating committee as being highly effective and

emotionally intelligent school psychologist leaders. The reader is referred to Table 1 below for

background information about each participant. Some information has been changed to protect

the anonymity of the participants.

Table 1

| Name | Work Setting | Roles & Responsibilities | Length of Time in the Setting & Stage of Career |
|---|---|---|---|
| Carol | Suburban public school district | • School psychologist<br>• Child Study Team member<br>• Supervises interns<br>• Consults with teachers and administration | • 10 years in current role<br>• Has been a school psychologist for 15+ years |
| Mary | School district that serves primarily Hispanic community. Students are early childhood through high school. | • District School Psychologist<br>• Consultation with staff and administration<br>• Supervises district behavior team & crisis response team<br>• Involved in all aspects of mental health program planning | • In district as school psychologist for 9 years (since beginning career)<br>• 5 years in current role |

| Table 1 - Continued | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Randy | School based mental health program serving early childhood through high school students and families. | • Director of School Based Mental Health Clinic<br>• Supervises graduate student interns<br>• Consults with administration and mental health staff | • 4 years in current role<br>• Approximately 10 years as school psychologist |
| Renee | Suburban public elementary school | • CST member<br>• Case management<br>• Consultation with teachers and administrators | • 6 years in current role<br>• Approximately 8 years as school psychologist |
| Sam | Clinical director of urban mental health clinic that provides outpatient services, school consultation and counseling | • Supervision of clinicians<br>• Mental health program planning<br>• Involved in hiring of staff | • 8 years in current role<br>• 15 years+ as school psychologist |
| Jackie | Suburban public school district | • Director of Special Services<br>• Supervises all special education teachers, CST members<br>• Responsible for all health services | • One month in current role<br>• 10 years as school psychologist |

**Procedures**

Each participant was interviewed by the investigator using a modified critical incident technique. Flanagan (1954) originally defined the technique as a "set of procedures for collecting direct observations of human behavior in such a way as to facilitate their potential usefulness in solving practical problems and developing broad psychological principles" (p.327). An incident was considered "critical" when the action taken contributed to an effective outcome, helped solve a problem, or resolved a situation. The critical incident interview technique was

chosen as it generates data that is rich in detail, enables the consideration of important context specific factors, and describes how participants behave in real-life situations (Cherniss, 2010).

The over arching aim of this exploratory research was to describe and gain insight into how a small sample of effective school psychology leaders used emotional intelligence to accomplish important goals. Based on the Mayer-Salovey model of EI, the investigator identified the ways in which the participants used the following abilities in handling critical incidents (1) accurately perceiving emotions – theirs and others, (2) using emotions to facilitate thought, decision making, and effective action, (3) understanding emotions and how they can change, and (4) managing emotions – theirs and others. The goal of the interview was to have the participant give specific examples involving all of these elements of EI during the interview. The first interview was conducted in June 2014, and the final interview in August 2014. Three of the interviews took place in person, and three were conducted over the phone (Sam, Jackie, Renee). Interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 1.5 hours. The interviews were audio recorded. The critical incident interview protocol for this study is presented in Appendix A.

**Data Analysis**

There were several phases that guided the analysis of the data. The first phase involved gaining familiarity with the data, which was accomplished by listening to the interview several times and then transcribing it. The next phase involved selecting and highlighting passages that seemed to show how the participant used core EI abilities (i.e., perception, expression, use of, understanding of, and management of emotion in self and others) to achieve a goal. After highlighting the use of an EI ability, a brief note was written explaining how the behavior reflected this ability. When a participant seemed to use an EI ability in a compelling way, this

portion of the interview was expanded upon and is included in the corresponding section of the Results.

The second phase involved reviewing the transcripts of a participant and identifying themes that emerged from the passages. While the first phase helped to categorize the behaviors into discreet categories based on an EI ability, the second phase helped to identify and report about overarching themes that emerged from the qualitative data. This activity was repeated for each of the participants. The noteworthy themes from the participants were compared with each other to see if there was a commonality among them. Important and shared themes are described in the Results and Discussion sections.

**Provisions of Protection of Private, Identifiable Information**

The interviews were not transcribed in their entirety. Segments were chosen and transcribed when they showed that the school psychologist used one or more of the core EI abilities to deal with a challenging situation and/or to achieve an important goal. Any identifiable information that found its way into an interview was deleted during the transcribing process. All other information about a participant's identity (e.g., names, addresses, places of work, etc.), along with the audio recordings of the interviews, are and will continue to be kept by the researcher in secure files for no more than seven years and will not be linked to any interview transcriptions or summaries of the findings. In order to maintain the anonymity of participants, at times certain facts were altered, such as the descriptions of their work setting, official titles, and gender.

<center>**Results**</center>

This study focused on the way in which several highly effective school psychologist leaders used emotional intelligence abilities to deal with challenging situations and achieve

important goals within their organizations.  The first four sections of the Results provide

anecdotal descriptions of how the school psychologists used four core emotional intelligence

abilities.  These abilities include: (1) accurately perceiving emotions, their own and others, (2)

using emotions to facilitate thought, decision making, and effective action, (3) understanding

emotions and how they can change, (4) and managing their own emotions and the emotions of

others.  The fifth section focuses on the school psychologists' strong commitment to the

organization's core goals, and to values such as caring and concern for others.  There will be an

exploration of how this theme related to their ability to successfully respond to complicated and

challenging situations.

**Accurately Perceiving and Expressing Emotion**

        The first section will focus on the school psychologists' ability to accurately perceive and

express emotions, and how they used this ability to effectively deal with challenging situations.

The ability to accurately perceive emotion is the first of the core emotional intelligence abilities

in the Mayer-Salovey Four Branch Model of Emotional Intelligence (Mayer & Salovey, 1997).

They describe this ability as important, "…because those who are more accurate can more

quickly perceive and respond to their own emotions and express those emotions to others.  Such

emotionally intelligent individuals can also respond more appropriately to their own feelings

because of the accuracy with which they perceive them" (Mayer & Salovey, 1999 p.194).  The

school psychologists interviewed in this study provided rich and nuanced descriptions of their

own feelings during challenging incidents, the feelings of the people around them, and the

effective ways in which they expressed their emotions in order to achieve important goals.  Table

2 lists the strategies used by the school psychologists.

Table 2

*Strategies Used to Accurately Perceive Emotions*

- Anticipate how people may react to events

- Having a keen awareness of emotions; own and others

*Strategies Used to Accurately Express Emotions*

- Expressing emotion in a way that reduces resistance in others

- Understanding when and how to express negative emotions

- Expressing empathy sincerely to soothe others

**Sam.** During the interview with Sam, he reflected on a challenging incident that included a mental health clinician with whom he worked and whom he supervised. Throughout the interview, Sam shared clear descriptions of his own feelings, as well as the feelings of the mental health clinician. As was mentioned above, an accurate perception of emotions is helpful in that it increases the likelihood that the individual will respond to others in ways that are helpful and effective. Sam provides some examples of this ability, and how it informed his approach to relating to the mental health clinician. Sam's approach, in the end, helped them maintain a positive working relationship, and also benefited the clinic at a programmatic level.

This incident took place at a youth and family mental health clinic where Sam served as head clinical supervisor. Sam, the mental health clinician, and an administrator from the clinic, were meeting to discuss a school-based program that the clinic had been contracted to develop. Although the clinician had already begun developing and implementing the program in one of the schools, Sam would now be overseeing all aspects of the project. The primary goal of the

program was to reduce disruptive behaviors of school-aged children in schools.  Sam thought

that the approach the clinician had taken was both programmatically unsound and not

sufficiently aligned with key objectives of the clinic.  For example, within the current model,

children with disruptive behaviors were removed from class and given individual counseling.

Sam, on the other hand, thought that the focus needed to be on addressing the issues from within

the classroom.   Reducing disruptive behaviors would best be achieved by altering conditions in

the classroom setting.  In addition, the program severely lacked clearly outlined goals and

methods for measuring outcomes.  Sam's main challenge in relation to the mental health

clinician, "…was to avoid undermining her ownership and effort into this project, but to have her

understand how to structure it in a way that's consistent with outcome measures and goals…"

As her colleague and supervisor, Sam also wanted to maintain a positive working relationship

with the clinician.

Prior to the meeting, Sam forecasted that the discussion about the program would elicit

difficult emotions in the mental health clinician.  Sam's predictions were accurate, and during the

meeting he perceived resistance from her.  He recognized that, "She was getting a little bit

upset…it wasn't going as she had planned…"  Sam described her feeling "undermined" and "a

bit knocked off her pedestal."  Sam felt that in order to support her position, "She made reference

to some type of paper that was generated by administrators.  So it seemed like she was using this

to gain some power and align herself with the key stakeholders."  Sam was aware of his own

emotions, and recognized feeling "increasingly irritated" and "disrespected."  Sam felt strongly

about promoting quality programming, and that he "wasn't going to endorse something that I felt

was lacking in terms of developing appropriate interventions and ways to measure outcomes."

After identifying his own emotions and the emotions of the clinician, Sam chose some strategies to reduce her resistance and increase her receptivity to addressing the needed changes of the program. Sam explained, "…I tried to get her to be more flexible. I peppered my comments with statements that were meant to praise her and commend her for her hard work. To show how much good stuff was in the project that she developed, and describe the times she had put plans in place in classrooms…so I tried to build on that."

Sam made numerous and varied attempts to help her move closer to his vision and he "…tried to address this in different ways by stressing that a new approach was indicated." The clinician remained steadfast in her approach, until Sam felt that there was a need for a more direct and forceful approach. Sam then said to her "…you know *Jane*…I know that you have experience as a mental health clinician, but have you ever had experience or courses in school related interventions?" When she responded that she did not have this experience, Sam commented, "Well…I teach this, so I have a pretty good idea about what types of approaches are indicated here." Sam described his rationale for becoming more confrontational and why it would be helpful. He explained, "I was really questioning her expertise and authority. She became kind of quiet after that, and I think she was kind of pissed that I had played that card, but it came to the point where I felt that I had to just meet this head-on." In the end, in order to achieve his goals, Sam expressed his emotions rather strongly, which also elicited in the clinician a strong reaction.

Ultimately, Sam was satisfied with the outcomes of the meeting. "Following the meeting," he shared, "she seemed to be relating fine to me. She forwarded me the plan she wrote, and different things she was going to go to edit it." In addition to positively impacting the goals of the program, Sam believes that the quality of their relationship was maintained. Sam also

provided a good example of how it is more effective sometimes for a leader to express negative

emotions rather than try to mask them or suppress them.  Sam's summary of the incident also

offers an additional "clue" as to how he achieved his desired outcomes, even when confronting

the clinician in a way that created discomfort in her.  "It's about respecting the hard work," Sam

explained, "…and there's a lot of stuff she did that was important for the project. While I have

different ideas, 'I still respect your hard work.  We happened to disagree on this, and I needed to

insert my power in this situation,' but I let her know that I wasn't attacking her personally or

questioning her confidence or her abilities."  Sam's sincere respect for the clinician, her hard

work, and her competence seems to have overshadowed his expression of irritability.

     **Jackie.**  Jackie provided several examples of how accurately perceiving her own

emotions and the emotions of others helped her deal effectively with challenging incidents.  As

background to an incident she shared, Jackie explained that only one month prior to the interview

she had assumed the role of Director of Special Services in her district.  The responsibilities of

this position were many, and included supervising all special education teachers, the Child Study

Team members, managing all health services, federal grant programs, and ancillary services.

Needless to say, this was a large professional jump for her.

     Jackie shared an incident in which she realized that the number of students enrolled in

special education classes for the coming year, outnumbered the available instructional assistants

required to staff these classes.  This personnel shortage became known to some of the teachers;

and a teacher of autistic children, concerned that she might not have enough instructional

assistants in her class, contacted Jackie.  Jackie reassured the teacher that they would provide her

with an additional instructional assistant, and Jackie specified a certain assistant whose position

would be shuffled in order to provide for her needs.  Since this move had not been finalized,

Jackie asked the teacher to keep this information confidential.  The teacher, it turned out, did not keep the information private.  The following day a different teacher contacted Jackie, letting her know that a number of instructional assistants were worried about the changes and were concerned that they were going to be placed in different classes.  Jackie described the challenge as, "…this is the first time that I needed to reprimand…well maybe not reprimand, but to have a serious and strict conversation" with a staff member.  At the same time Jackie wanted to create positive and supportive relationships with her team, and to be perceived by them as an approachable administrator.  The manner in which Jackie approached this challenge highlights her ability to accurately perceive emotions, and then craft her approach in order to build relationships and also define her administrative role.

Jackie shared that she first approached the instructional assistant who had received some inaccurate information and said, "I understand that you may have been given some information by a teacher about your placement for next year."  Jackie perceived that the assistant became "really anxious" and expressed her worry that "I wasn't doing a good job and that's why I was getting moved."  Sensing the instructional assistant's anxiety, Jackie responded by "reassuring her that she wasn't getting moved because of something that she had done."  After letting her know that the reason for the move was "actually because you're very flexible, have a lot of good skills and strengths that can be utilized in a variety of settings," the assistant "seemed to be much more calm."  By accurately perceiving the instructional assistant's anxiety, Jackie was able to respond to her emotions in a way that was soothing and helpful.

Discussing the breach of confidentiality with the teacher of the autism class was a more challenging task for Jackie and evoked in her uncomfortable feelings.  She perceived within herself some "residual anxiety about being promoted to a different role from within."  Some of

this worry Jackie attributed to not "…knowing if there are going to be some boundary issues and are people going to respect my role since they know me in a different way…" Jackie invited the teacher to meet with her; and when they met, Jackie directly expressed her anger and dismay. "I let her know," she said, "that I was very upset that after we had our conversation together, I clearly remember telling her that this is between us." Jackie saw that the teacher was becoming anxious, as her body language was "very fidgety." She let the teacher know that "…my expectation is that if I tell you something in confidence, that means it needs to stay that way." As was suggested in the previous incident with Sam, at times, an expression of anger, can be an emotionally intelligent and helpful response. At the same time, Jackie also tried to calm her and let her know that she was not in trouble. Jackie reflected on the way in which she expressed her emotions to the teacher, and how this approach supported her goals. "So I feel like I was kind of stern," Jackie explained, "to make sure that she got the message, but at the same time I didn't want to burn any bridges."

Perhaps the most critical and helpful emotional response Jackie had that contributed to maintaining their relationship was empathy, which involves the accurate perception of another person's feelings. During the uncomfortable interaction between the two, Jackie made sure to communicate that "I understood where she's coming from and I empathize with her…and I told her that. 'I get that you're anxious and a lot of people go through this…'" Although the incident was quite recent, Jackie felt positive about the outcomes and how she handled the situation. "I'm satisfied," Jackie said, "we left things that if there's anything that she needs she should really come to me. Nothing else has come up yet…"

The ability to accurately perceive and express emotions is the first of the four core emotional intelligence abilities. A critical step beyond perceiving emotions is the ability to

express emotions in a way that takes in to consideration the needs of the other and the needs of

the situation. As discussed above, Jackie was able to accurately identify her own emotions, the

emotions of the teacher, and then express her emotions in a way that helped her to achieve two

seemingly disparate goals. One of her goals was establish a hierarchical administrative role,

indicating a need for "distance." On the other hand, through empathy she also managed to build

relationships and a sense of "closeness." An additional aspect to this ability reflected in the

approaches of Sam and Jackie, is that in order to achieve goals, there is sometimes a need to

express negative emotions and elicit discomfort in others. With that said, underlying their

expression of anger was sincere, rather than contrived or superficial empathy and respect. An

effective use of this ability helped these school psychologists achieve a variety of important

outcomes, both interpersonal and organizational.

**Use Emotion to Facilitate Thought and Guide Decision Making**

This section explores the ways in which the participants used their emotions to facilitate

thought, guide decision-making, and take effective action. This is the second ability included in

the Mayer-Salovey Four Branch Model of Emotional Intelligence, in which individuals use

emotion to facilitate thought or "assimilate emotion in thought" (Mayer & Salovey, 1997).

Emotions alert an individual and draw their attention to matters of importance, and a person with

this ability is able to use the emotional experience to help prioritize thinking and help with

decision-making. This is in contrast to some earlier beliefs that decision-making is an entirely

rational process, and that emotions actually constitute an impediment to effective action. As

Cherniss (2006) writes in his research on leadership and EI, "Emotion provides important

information that helps leaders to make decisions and make choices" (p.134). In this section there

will be an exploration of the ways in which Mary and Randy used their emotions to guide

thinking, make decisions, and achieve important goals.  Table 3 lists the strategies used to

support this ability.

Table 3

*Strategies for Using Emotion to Facilitate Thinking and Guide Decision Making*

- Paying attention to emotions
- Considering the information embedded in emotions
- Using the information to inform decision-making

**Mary**.  Mary shared an incident in which she used her emotions to facilitate thinking and

decision-making.  Mary explained that she maintained an informal mentoring role with an autism

specialist working within her district.  This autism specialist experienced on-going rejection and

open hostility by the staff.  As Mary described, "She's really had a lot of conflict with

teachers…she's really just been beaten up."  In one particular incident Mary was told by the

supervisor of the special needs preschool program to attend a meeting that involved the autism

specialist and one of the teachers.  There was a history of tension, animosity, and mistrust

between the autism specialist and this particular teacher.  The supervisor said to Mary, "I need

you to go to the building on Monday, because I think there's going to be a real blowup there…"

Later, Mary learned that one reason she was being told to attend the meeting was because the

supervisor would be taking a personal day and unavailable to participate.  The autism specialist

was highly anxious and fearful about meeting with this teacher.  Mary explained that the autism

specialist "…was just totally freaked out.  She actually thought that the teacher's going to

physically attack her."

As was mentioned above, emotions alert the individual and draw their attention to matters

of importance.  This situation elicited in Mary feelings of "awkwardness" and "confusion" about

her role, and ambivalence about attending this meeting.  She was concerned for the welfare of

the autism specialist, and wanted to support her.  On the other hand, Mary was worried that her presence would be confusing and would likely exacerbate the existing tension between the autism specialist and the teacher.  She also had to consider that her supervisor had asked her to attend this meeting and she was "being told I have to do this!"

As opposed to becoming overwhelmed or incapacitated by the discomfort of the situation, Mary was able to access the information embedded within her emotional experience to facilitate thinking and decision-making. After "tuning in" to her various feelings, and evaluating the different courses of action, Mary concluded that it would be best to work individually with the autism specialist so that she could learn to manage her own emotions and prepare for the meeting in a more composed manner.  Mary described how she "spent some time on the phone with her…really trying to calm her down and helping her balance out what was going on in her mind."  Over the weekend Mary continued her support by texting her "just to check in to see how she was doing."  "It took a few days to get there," Mary concluded, but with her support and guidance the autism specialist reported to her "I think I'm going to be okay."

**Randy.**  Randy discussed an incident that highlights his ability to use his emotions to facilitate thinking and decision-making.  Randy shared that a new assistant to the director of special services had recently joined the district.  In the past, the Child Study Team (CST) had communicated directly with the director of special services for the district, but the new assistant had "blocked" this communication and she now dealt directly with the CST.  Randy described the new assistant as having a "bulldozer," "heavy handed," and punitive approach to managing the CST.  Within this context Randy discussed a challenging interaction he had with the new assistant director of special services.  As will be seen, through the process of paying close attention and "listening in" to the information embedded in his feelings, Randy realized that for

the sake of achieving important organizational goals, there was a need to carefully manage this particular relationship.

Randy received an enigmatic email from the assistant saying, "…can we discuss something?  Do you have time?"  The pre-existing level of suspicion and distrust Randy had for this colleague, coupled with the enigmatic purpose of the email, triggered anxiety in him.  "I think it's sort of her style," Randy commented, "to throw something out there and catch you off balance a bit."  When they met, the assistant told Randy that a group of graduate students collecting data at the school's mental health clinic were a disruptive burden to one of the CST administrative assistants.  "The university students are kind of driving Susie crazy," the assistant to the director said, "…she's just going bonkers."  One reason why this interaction elicited anxiety in Randy was because he was responsible for the graduate students in the school building and was a liaison with a local university conducting the research.  Randy was concerned that the new assistant would use this complaint as an opportunity to generate negative perceptions of him and "…somehow use this in order to put me in a bad light."  Randy was worried, "…and I don't think it's unfounded," he added, that she could undermine the "good collaboration I have with staff."  Randy then used the information embedded in his emotional reactions to facilitate thinking and decision-making.  He acknowledged the anxiety, but he did not focus on the negative aspects of the feeling, try to find ways to decrease or avoid the discomfort, or react impulsively to this perceived threat. "I think that the anxiety," Randy explained, "is a signal to me to be very careful.  And in a way I think I'm smart because I think she needs very careful maintenance."

Randy described a different encounter he had with the assistant head, in which she expressed to him the need for "more feedback about the counseling cases" in the school-based

mental health clinic. Randy was thinking, "Communication is really a two-way street and I started thinking, 'Why do we keep having to give you all the information?'" Randy shared that this person "…can be really pushy…and I tend to be very adaptable and flexible. When I get angry, however, that's a signal to me that I need to set a boundary." In response to her request Randy said, "You know…I think we really need to work on sharing information better."

Randy perceives himself, and indeed presents, as an individual who seeks to connect, bond, and build relationships. When it comes to his professional demeanor, he sees himself as "flexible" and "adaptable." As a school psychology leader, he has broad visions for increasing the integration of mental health into the larger school system. In Randy's estimation, these goals depend on maintaining his reputation in the building, and fostering positive collaboration with colleagues. On the other hand, the anxiety, suspicion, and general discomfort he felt towards the assistant alerted him that, for the sake of his goals, and at least for the moment, there was a need to go against his natural inclinations and to "carefully maintain" the relationship by setting clear boundaries.

These incidents help illustrate how Mary and Randy applied the ability to use emotions to facilitate thought, guide decision-making, and effective action. Mary, for example, found a way to be supportive of the autism specialist, while avoiding involvement in a potentially volatile situation. Randy, in his own way, used this ability to manage a difficult, yet important relationship with the new assistant to the director of special services in his district. Instead of feelings being an obstacle to thinking and decision-making, these school psychologists recognized that their emotional responses to challenging situations and people were important sources of information.

**Understanding Emotions and How They Can Change**

This section will focus on the third emotional intelligence ability in the Mayer-Salovey Four Branch Model, which is the ability to understand emotions and how they can change.  There are several sub-abilities included in this branch of the EI model, such as understanding the causes of emotions and their relationship to human psychological needs, the relationships between emotions and how and why they can change from one feeling to another, and how emotions lead to behaviors (Mayer & Salovey 1997 p.11).  Two additional and important aspects to this ability emerged when analyzing the interviews with Carol and Mary.  The first observation is that school psychologist leaders believe that emotions are highly important, and they therefore make it a priority to learn what and why people are feeling certain feelings.  The second theme that emerged from the interviews with Carol and Mary is that they actively, rather than passively, sought out and looked for evidence of how events are impacting the thoughts, emotions, and behaviors of their colleagues and community members.  In this section there will be an exploration of the ways in which Carol and Mary used these abilities in order to conceptualize complex situations, and how they used this conceptualization to effectively deal with different challenging situations.  Table 5 lists the strategies used.

Table 4

*Strategies for Understanding Emotions and How They Can Change*

- Actively conducting emotional reconnaissance to understand how people are feeling
- Attempting to understand how events influence emotions; own and others
- Understanding how behaviors relate to human psychological needs
- Understanding how feelings change over time

**Carol**.  Carol discussed a significant change occurring in the school district where she worked as a school psychologist.  The district was in the process of hiring a new superintendent, which, in Carol's estimation constituted a major organizational change, which had repercussions at many levels.  Adding to the potency of this change, it is helpful to note that the outgoing superintendent, who had been at the school for over 15 years, was a powerful, charismatic leader, and to some, an intimidating boss.  Carol believed that this shift in leadership was significant, and she proactively assessed how this change was influencing the feelings, thoughts, and behaviors of her colleagues.  Reflecting this proactive approach, Carol shared that "…at every meeting I am conscious now, and try to watch how people are defining themselves for the new potential superintendent…" The following incident is an example of Carol's ability to understand the relationship between organizational change and the thoughts and feelings of her colleagues. Carol was able to identify how her colleagues' response to this change reflected certain "human psychological needs."  These skills helped Carol achieve important outcomes, such as causing a high-stakes meeting to change course, and influencing some critical decisions.

As part of the hiring process, Carol joined a presentation in which two assistant superintendents were introducing the final superintendent candidate to administrators from across the district.  From the outset Carol anticipated a great deal of discomfort, awkwardness, and confusion surrounding this presentation. This meeting elicited discomfort in the participants since, "Everybody assumed that this was their next boss…there was an understanding or a misunderstanding that this was a done deal. He was now being presented to the administrative staff…for interviewing?!  You're interviewing your boss?! And people weren't comfortable at all…"  For those present, there was an

assumption that this candidate had secured this new role. Therefore, the administrative team perceived a hierarchical relationship, when one did not actually exist.

Carol entered this meeting aware and curious of how these organizational factors would impact her colleagues and their behavior. She described that for over an hour the candidate "talked about marketing…really in a lot of different ways," yet never spoke about education. The other administrators posed questions that related directly to the presentation about "marketing" since, as Carol perceived, "…they were asking questions about what they understood the candidate to be interested in." Their perspective was, "Let me show the boss that I'm interested in what he is interested in.'" Carol empathized with the discomfort of her colleagues and understood that their behaviors may have been serving specific human psychological needs, such as self-preservation, a desire for acceptance, and avoidance of conflict. This conceptualization helped her to manage her own emotions, to reflect on the absurdity of the situation, and consider the far-reaching implications of this candidate becoming the new superintendent.

Carol responded to this situation by first identifying her own emotions and trying to understand why she was having them. Carol described becoming increasingly agitated and recalls thinking, "An hour is a long time! With school leaders…educational leaders and you're not talking about education?!" Carol's agitation came from her discomfort with the priorities of the presenter, as she exclaimed, "You wasted an hour of time meeting with educators and not talking about education…and that's not OK!" Although she empathized with the experience of her colleagues, Carol was upset with their behavior, since by fully engaging the candidate in a lengthy discussion about marketing and public relations, they were giving their tacit approval and support for these priorities.

After an hour of listening, Carol was asked to share her thoughts and pose any questions. She admitted that what she decided to say was "…a particularly risky thing…because that could be my next boss! Actually that was the plan!" Despite the unknown repercussions, Carol said the following:

> We've been talking now for an hour and it would be really terrible if we ended and never talked about education! Why don't you tell us about what you think a good nursery class would look like, and a good elementary school class, and a good middle school class, and high school class? What's your picture of a good class?

As a result of Carol's comments and questions, the candidate shifted gears and the participants were able to learn more about the candidate's background and perspectives on education. Apparently, his knowledge about education was not extensive or comprehensive. Carol had no idea how others in the room, especially the assistant superintendents, reacted to her question. Later that day she received a phone call from one of the assistant superintendents, and it turned out that her contribution to the meeting, in their opinion, was highly valuable. The assistant conveyed that they "…were extremely grateful that we got redirected," as they were quite unhappy with the direction of the presentation. Ultimately, this candidate was deemed a "poor fit" and not hired as the new superintendent.

The above incident highlights Carol's ability to understand how organizational changes move through a system and affect thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. She also interpreted the response of her colleagues as serving human psychological needs. Carol used these abilities to influence a high-stakes meeting, which may have impacted the hiring process of the new superintendent. This incident also helps to show the link

between EI and leadership.  Although not in a formal leadership role, Carol demonstrated

real initiative, independence, and courage.  In doing so, she exhibited key leadership

attributes such as remaining committed to organizational missions and values, and

inspiring others to adhere to these principles.

**Mary**.  Mary also provided some examples of her ability to understand emotions

and how they can change.  In addition to her general understanding of the relationship

between events and emotions, Mary was skilled at understanding how feelings change

over time.  Part of Mary's success, similar to Carol, was that she proactively sought to

understand how events moved through a community and contributed to their emotions.

These abilities helped Mary to effectively support a community in crisis.

Mary spent much of the interview discussing one particularly challenging and

emotional incident. She shared that early one morning, the principal of a school within her

district suffered a sudden stroke in the parking lot of the school.  He was on life support,

and subsequently died one month later.  He was a beloved and long time member of the

community.  Faculty, administration, and students experienced intense emotional reactions

to the trauma and loss.  The event triggered confusion, fear, grief, and interpersonal

conflict.  There was an added level of complexity that resulted from the viewing of the

deceased in the gymnasium of the school.  Mary effectively used her understanding of

emotions, and the factors contributing to them, in order to respond to the needs of the

community.

Mary recognized that this tragedy would set in motion complex and diverse emotional

reactions.  With this realization, she understood that it was not enough to consider emotional

reactions in general; rather, in order to deal effectively with the crisis situation, it was vital to

attain a highly detailed and precise map of the feelings of the community members.  From the

outset she immediately began thinking about how the event would manifest in the emotional

lives of the community members.  "The school," Mary explained, "has roughly 900 students, and

all the staff.  So you need to get the staff roster and go down the list and think about who's

closest with him…I mean all are close to him. Are there any staff members that recently argued

with him?  Are there any staff numbers that have had family members that passed recently…any

possible scenario that somebody could be affected by.  And it's hard to do that…to go to the staff

because they're all distraught."

     Mary recognized the perils of responding to this crisis without properly considering the

potential emotional state of the community members.  She explained that in these types of crises,

"…you really have to think about all of these things in the moment, because if you don't,

emotions just run rampant. You don't want to offend anybody…you have to be very careful…"

Mary discussed some of the information she collected and how recent events may have impacted

the emotions of staff.  Mary learned that "…the librarian who was arguing with him just the

week before was not doing well at all. And we had a group of two kindergarten teachers who just

a week before had gone into Manhattan with him and they were on *Good Day New York*.  They

had just been dancing around having a great time!"  Upon entering the school Mary did not have

this information, "…so I needed to find the people who can give me this information."  Mary

understood that the process of seeking out this data needed to be done with sensitivity.  The

culture of this community is very "territorial," she shared, "…so you have to be very cautious."

     The level of emotional analysis deepened beyond considering the emotional

experience of the faculty and community members she was supporting.  She also

conducted an emotional survey of the district counselors she was recruiting to providing

the therapeutic services for students and faculty. As she was drafting a crisis response

support team Mary recalls thinking, "Who among the counselors knows him and who

doesn't? Who's comfortable and who's not comfortable?" Mary recognized that the

readiness and ability of the counselors to provide support depended on their relationship

with the principal and how they were reacting to the event.

An additional scenario within this larger crisis highlights Mary's understanding of

emotions, and specifically her ability to understand how they can change. On her way home

after the day of the principal's stroke, Mary began thinking about how the feelings in the

community may change over the course of the evening and into the next day. She recalls

thinking, "…tomorrow's going to be the worst day. They go home, they have time to think about

things, everybody talks about it. When they come back either everybody's become really

upset…you really have a wide range of emotions." These considerations guided Mary as she

began considering how she would address the community at a full-staff meeting the next

morning. There was significant pressure on Mary leading up to this meeting, and she described

that the meeting would include approximately 60 staff members, the vice principal, an interim

superintendent, and Mary's supervisor. Mary recalls some of the pressures and how "…all these

people are looking at you…and the weight is entirely on you." Although Mary had significant

experience in crisis response, this situation was "simply overwhelming" in its intensity,

complexity, and scale.

Mary began her speech by covering procedural issues such as "the importance of

keeping all the kids on track and on their schedules," but the content and tone became more

emotional when she added, "…because that's what he would want. He would want us to take

care of the children." Mary began to cry during the speech. After regaining her composure she

continued, "We all need to band together here to support the kids and support one another…and we'll get through the day. We really can't do anything else right now…all we can do is hope and pray and support one another…" When Mary looked up, the room was totally silent, which soon gave way to a wave of tears and emotion.

Mary's emotional speech to the community relates to another incident that involved one particular teacher that she perceived as hostile to her presence in the school and activities in response to the crisis. Mary recalls thinking, "This woman just can't stand me…and I was in the main office downstairs after the staff meeting and she comes then she says to me, 'You know…you're not supposed to make people cry like that!'" The teacher continued to actively thwart Mary's attempts to provide support. Mary shared that when she would approach the teacher's classroom, "…before I even said anything, she'd say 'I'm fine. I don't need any help.'" Despite the open rejection, Mary kept an eye on the teacher and continued to reach out and leave the proverbial "door" open.

Mary's ability to delicately navigate this relationship and provide support highlights her ability to understand emotions and how they change over time. She appears to have understood that the teacher's anger was not directly related to her, but was the teacher's way of dealing with the pain. Mary said, "You know you have to respect everybody and at the same time you recognize that she's really having a hard time." With this perspective and emotional understanding, Mary was able to maintain a relationship with the teacher over time.

After the funeral there was a heartwarming resolution to the conflict. The teacher voluntarily approached Mary and said, "You know…I feel much better." Mary asked if she could get anything for the teacher, to which she responded, "I would just love a cup of coffee." Mary, without skipping a beat responded, "I'll get you a cup of coffee…and after that she was

fine." Reflecting on this teacher and her particular way of dealing with the tragedy, Mary

concluded, "You know…this was about a month later. This was a long process…and at first she

didn't want anyone." Mary demonstrated in this incident an understanding of the relationship

between events, emotions, and behavior. She also understood that emotions change and evolve

over time. These skills, together with her deep caring, enabled her to support the teacher, even in

the midst of a complicated emotional situation.

This section focused on the school psychologist leaders' ability to understand emotions,

how events influence emotions and behaviors, and how emotions can change over time. Both

Carol and Mary demonstrated a strong ability to identify how organizational changes, as well as

unexpected tragedies, move through a community and lead to a range of emotions and behavioral

responses. Carol and Mary also showed that effective school psychologists proactively seek to

understand how events impact thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Engaging in this "emotional

reconnaissance" helped them to respond in ways that benefited their organizations and

community members.

**Managing Their Own Emotions and the Emotions of Others**

The ability to manage one's own emotions, and the emotions of others is the final ability

in the Mayer-Salovey Four Branch Model of Emotional Intelligence. This ability "concerns the

conscious regulation of emotions to enhance emotional and intellectual growth" (Mayer &

Salovey; 1997, p. 14). The ability to manage emotions played a particularly crucial role for the

school psychologist leaders included in this study. As Cherniss (2006) writes, "It is in the

management of their own emotions that the importance of emotional intelligence for leaders

becomes most clear. Researchers have found that high levels of stress and anxiety reduce one's

capacity to handle information. The higher the degree of stress, the fewer bits of information can one handle in one's brain" (p. 136).

The school psychologists in this study discussed a range of approaches they used in order to manage emotions, some of which are explicitly outlined in the Mayer-Salovey model of EI. For example, in order to manage emotions, Mayer and Salovey (1997) discuss the "ability to stay open to feelings, both those that are pleasant and those that are unpleasant." They also include the "ability to reflectively engage or detach from an emotion depending on its judged informativeness or utility." An additional sub-skill is the "ability to manage emotions in oneself and others by moderating negative emotions and enhancing pleasing ones, without repressing or exaggerating information (p. 11)." In this section there will be an exploration of how four school psychologist leaders managed their own emotions, the emotions of others, and how this ability helped them deal with a variety of challenging situations. The different emotional management strategies are listed in the Table 6.

Table 5

*Emotional Management Strategies: Self & Others*

| |
| --- |
| • Planning ahead |
| • Seeking the help of others |
| • Using self-talk |
| • Remaining open to feelings, both pleasant and unpleasant |
| • Detaching from emotions in order to reflect on their utility |
| • Understanding how actions may impact others |
| • Expressing sincere empathy |
| • Providing reassurance and support |

**Renee.** Renee is a member of the Child Study Team (CST) at her school, and in this capacity she is frequently involved in meetings in which a child's eligibility for services is discussed and determined. The challenge she experiences most frequently in these meetings is when there is a disagreement between the CST and the parents regarding the best way to support a child. For Renee, engaging in emotional management strategies prior to CST meetings, such as facilitating planning meetings and collaborating with colleagues, were the best ways to stay composed during the actual meetings.

Renee discussed an incident that took place during a CST meeting with the parents of a developmentally delayed child who wanted him placed in a mainstream, regular education setting. The child was significantly delayed academically, and the position of the CST was that he needed more intensive services, within a special education setting, so that he could possibly enter a less restrictive environment in the future. Renee was leading the CST meeting that included the parents of the child, a learning consultant, the principal, the director of special services, two special education teachers, a general education teacher, a speech therapist, an occupational therapist, and a behavioral specialist.

Renee recalled feeling significant anxiety and frustration prior to going into the meeting. The rest of the team, she reported, was feeling similarly: "everybody's emotions were heightened." Renee and the rest of the team held a pre-meeting during which they reviewed the case and "came to some type of conclusion about what's the hard line" with their position, and beyond what point they would not move. In this meeting the team coordinated an approach and clarified their position, which helped Renee maintain her emotional composure during the actual CST meeting.

The meeting with the parents was, as anticipated, contentious.  The parents attempted to build a case that promoted mainstream inclusion, and as Renee described, "the mom brought in a lot of articles about inclusion to back up what she thought…and that all therapies should be done in the classroom."  Renee and the CST, on the other hand, thought that the child needed more intensive services, which should be delivered individually or in a more restrictive educational setting.  The CST meeting went on for three hours, during which Renee "felt like we simply weren't hearing each other after a while,"  and that every time they seemed to resolve one issue, the parents raised another issue and request.

Despite the frustration and feeling that she was "being told that you need to do more research and you don't know what you're talking about," Renee managed her emotions and "did not show any frustration.  I just spoke my mind and calmly shared my professional opinion." Renee continually tried to empathize with the parents and also "let them know that we really do have your child's best interest at heart."

Renee used two primary strategies to manage her emotions: planning ahead of time, and seeking out specific people that could help her do so.  In this incident, these two strategies were reflected in the pre-meeting she conducted prior to the CST meeting, and the coordination of opinions and positions with her colleagues.  In the end, the two parties were able to engage in a dialogue in which they arrived at a mutually agreeable compromise.

**Jackie**.  Jackie described emotional management strategies that were similar to those used by Renee.  She found that planning ahead of time and seeking the help of trusted others were helpful ways to manage her feelings before and during challenging situations.  An incident was previously discussed in which Jackie confronted an autism teacher who had breached her confidence about the placement of an instructional assistant.  Jackie described activities that she

did prior to meeting with the teacher that helped her to manage her emotions during the actual encounter. "I really like to plan things," Jackie shared, "so if I go in with something of a plan it's helpful…it's helpful to have the structure..." For Jackie, discussing the situation with others helped her to manage her emotions in order to think clearly. She described herself as "…a talker and I like to talk things out and process them. I ran some ideas by my husband. 'What do you think if I said this to her? How would that go?'"

Prior to her emotionally difficult encounter with the teacher, Jackie used self-talk, another strategy used by several of the school psychologists, in order to manage her emotions. Jackie described doing "a lot of self talk…because when I was sitting there waiting for the teacher to come in, I felt the anxiety kicking in again." She conducted an internal dialogue in which she reframed the situation, which helped her to regain her composure. Jackie explained that, "I was telling myself, 'It's going to be fine.' I was reviewing in my mind how I wanted to approach her…and that this is what I need to do in this position…as part of my role…and that did help."

Within this incident Jackie also demonstrated how she used empathy, as well as reassurance and support, to help manage the emotions of the teacher. First, Jackie showed how she used her own anxiety as a way to empathize with the teacher, which then helped her to help the teacher calm down. "I'm always anxious," Jackie shared, "that's my fallback emotion. Since I'm an anxious person, I really tried to empathize with her…and I really could empathize with her." Jackie identified with the teacher's worry and said to her, "…I know how anxiety-provoking it can be to be so close to school and not have everything squared away…" Jackie then went on to reassure the teacher and promise her support. "… I tried to let her know that, 'I have your back…and I'm not letting you go without having the proper support. If you've got a problem you know you can call me and we'll work it out…" Jackie's attempts to regulate the

emotions of the teacher appeared to be successful, and "By the end of the conversation she definitely calmed down.  She was laughing a little bit and seemed more relaxed…she was smiling."

Emotionally intelligent individuals, according to Mayer and Salovey, have the "ability to manage emotions in oneself and others by moderating negative emotions and enhancing pleasing ones, without repressing or exaggerating information" (Mayer & Slovey, p.11).  Jackie's approach to the teacher reflected this skill, as she was able to moderate the teacher's discomfort, increase the teacher's pleasant sensations, yet at the same time not compromise the need set clear limits regarding the breach of confidentiality.

**Randy.**  One strategy that Randy used in order to manage his emotions was relating to his feelings in a way that was accepting and open.  Randy's attitude reflects the Mayer and Salovey description of the "ability to stay open to feelings, both those that are pleasant and those that are unpleasant."  This openness to feelings, both comfortable and uncomfortable, guided how Randy dealt with emotionally challenging situations.  "I use mindfulness in most everything I do," Randy explained, "and that's really the foundation of just how I try to interact in the building.  Calm demeanor, relaxed, and try to be as clear as possible."

The following incident highlights how remaining open and accepting of his emotions enabled Randy to stay calm and cognitively flexible during a challenging incident. Randy participated in a planning meeting focusing on a female student who was exhibiting highly disruptive behaviors.  Present at the meeting were Randy, a former principal, an interim principal, the dean of students, a school counselor who had worked briefly with the student, and a counselor from an in-home therapy service.  Randy thought that the two principals held very harsh, punitive attitudes; they indicated that they would like the student removed from the

school. Randy recalled one of the principals sarcastically commenting, "…this girl's got real problems…is she brain damaged or something?"

During the research interview, Randy also discussed his vision of increasing the collaboration between the school-based mental health clinic and the administration in order to address maladaptive student behaviors. Randy thus felt added pressure to perform well at these meetings and make them valuable in order not to jeopardize this goal. He described feeling, "…anxious about integrating ourselves into the school system since we were pulling for these meetings to take place." He went on to say, "if we really get this team thing going and organized, it could be really productive and therapeutic…" The behaviors of the administrators and the tone of the meeting thus made Randy's anxiety even more acute because they constituted obstacles to his vision of greater collaboration.

Thus, in this incident there was a particularly strong need for Randy to manage his emotions in order to maintain his composure and intellectual flexibility. During the research interview Randy said the following:

> And I think that in these scenarios I just say, 'This is the type situation that makes me feel anxious…and that's okay.' Just being with that feeling of anxiety…or when it comes to the assistant director of student services…just being with that sense of annoyance with people who are pushy. And with the assistant principal, it is being with the feeling that there's a wall going up. All these things produce anxiety and I don't think that it makes sense to try to push them away, but to be able to sit there and be with it…

"Being with" his emotions, as opposed to trying to control or "push them away," was, ironically, a helpful way to manage them. The process of managing his emotions enhanced his

intellectual functioning, and in the midst of this challenging incident, Randy described being able to "…get in a more calm and clear place and sit with the anxiety. When I do this some ideas usually start to emerge and I see the situation a little more clearly." After becoming "calm and clear," Randy said that he developed "…a little goal in myself," and he recalled thinking, "I don't know what to do with this kid…but there's two weeks left in the school year. We can't fix her, but our goal is to reduce the intensity, frequency, and duration of these behavioral episodes." Randy used acceptance and openness to unpleasant feelings as an emotional management strategy. This enabled him to then share with the team the way in which he framed the situation, which led to a productive conversation.

**Carol.** Carol also demonstrated a strong ability to manage her emotions while in the midst of challenging situations. Her approach to managing emotions, in particular, reflected the "ability to reflectively engage or detach from an emotion depending on its judged informativeness or utility" (Mayer & Salovey, p.11). In a previous section there was a more detailed account of Carol's participation in a presentation in which two assistant superintendents introduced the final candidate for the role of district superintendent. Carol was deeply disturbed by the fact that the final candidate spoke for over an hour about marketing and public relations, and not about education. Carol's emotional reaction to the situation was strong and she described that "I was very aware that I was growing more and more agitated. I was doing my best not to show it but I felt like I was going to jump out of my skin!"

Carol explained that her goal in the meeting was, "…how can I get a reaction so that people start thinking again without being openly disrespectful or overly critical or something." As Carol listened to the presentation, she was keenly aware of the need to manage her emotions in order to achieve this goal. For approximately an hour Carol listened to the presentation,

learned about the candidate, and also considered the best way to contribute to the conversation. During the research interview Carol was asked what she did in order to manage her emotions. Her response was informative and revealed her use of a number of emotional management strategies.  Carol's response was as follows:

> You know, you have conversations with yourself…and try to understand what that emotional reaction is, why you might be having it, and what you want to do with it.  In my case the answer is usually, "What do you need to do to inhibit this emotional reaction?"  And if you have a contribution to make, how to make it without being emotional. How to make a contribution that will…well…be a contribution and move the process along.  Without pissing people off or hurting people's feelings or something like that.  And so in terms of managing emotion…I assume being extremely thoughtful. Before saying anything…to think about what the impact's going to be to what I say. And is that likely to move us along.  Rather than being an unregulated expression of emotion…which isn't such a good thing professionally.

This comment sheds light on different strategies that Carol used in order to manage her emotions.  One approach was her use of "self-talk," which enabled her to gain some distance from her emotions in order to reflect on them.  Carol hinted to this ability when she said, you "…try to understand what that emotional reaction is, why you might be having it, and what you want to do with it."  In this example, Carol first identified and perceived her emotions, then tried to understand why she was experiencing them, and finally she judged their utility by thinking about "what to do" with them.  This process enabled Carol to manage her emotions, rather than allowing the emotions to dictate her behavior.  Her response also suggests that an understanding of the feelings of others and how they may respond to an event – a different emotional

intelligence ability – helped her to manage her own emotions. Carol talked about being "extremely thoughtful" before speaking, and carefully considering the potential impact of her comments on the feelings of those around her.

As noted above, Carol believed that she had an immediate and powerful impact on the course of the discussion and likely influenced important organizational decisions. Successfully managing her emotions helped Carol to achieve her primary goals, one of which was to get people "thinking again," and the other was to do so "without being openly disrespectful."

The ability to manage one's own emotions, and the emotions of others is a critical emotional intelligence ability. In this section, Renee and Jackie shared strategies that they used to manage their emotions before entering into stressful situations. Preparing ahead of time, and seeking out the help of others, helped them maintain their composure during challenging situations, such as contentious CST meetings or when critiquing a supervisee. Difficult situations, on the other hand, are often unanticipated, and it is therefore important to be able to manage one's emotions whenever they occur. Randy and Carol provided several examples of how they managed their emotions "in the heat of the battle," so to speak. High levels of stress and anxiety, two feelings frequently experienced during challenging situations, reduce one's capacity to think in an effective manner. On the other hand, managing emotions increases intellectual capacity, and thus contributes to thoughtful decision-making and action. These school psychologists provided examples of how managing their emotions helped them to maintain their capacity to think clearly, which then enabled them to achieve important goals.

**More than Skill: A Strong Commitment to Core Organizational Goals and Personal Values**

In this section there will be a discussion about a unique theme that emerged particularly from the interviews with Carol and Mary. These two school psychologist leaders demonstrated a strong commitment to the organization's core goals, and to values such as caring and concern for others. Having a clarity of values and a commitment to them enabled these school psychologists to perform at a high level, even in emotionally charged, confusing, and uncomfortable situations. These values acted as compasses that helped them stay on course, inspired them to take risks, and ultimately helped distinguish them as leaders in their communities.

**Carol.** In previous sections, I described how Carol used specific emotional intelligence abilities to deal effectively with an incident involving a meeting in which a candidate for superintendent met with an administrative team. However, Carol's commitment to the organization's core goals and her personal values also contributed to her strong and positive leadership.

This was an uncomfortable situation for all present because everyone "…assumed that this was their next boss." The inherent awkwardness of the meeting led Carol's colleagues to go along with the candidate and discuss "marketing" because, as she believed, they were thinking, "Let me show the boss that I'm interested in what he or she is interested in." However, the direction of this meeting conflicted with Carol's personal values, as well as her understanding of the mission and goals of the organization. .

While the situation was inherently uncomfortable, the administrators were only expected to listen to the candidate, and if they wished, engage him in a dialogue. Carol's personal values and commitment to the organization's goals, however, did not allow her to remain silent, passive, or complicit. She was aware that candidly sharing her thoughts was "…a particularly risky

thing, because that could be my next boss! Actually that was the plan!" She admitted being quite anxious about speaking her mind, and shared that, "I suppose there's an insecurity…that maybe I'm totally off base here. Maybe that's what they're interested in…they're recruited a new superintendent to do PR. If that's what it is…so be it…I'm not judging it." Carol, it should be noted, was a relatively new member of the school community and not familiar with the assistant superintendents and their priorities. "I don't really know the arena I'm in," she confided.

   Despite the personal risks, the anxiety, and her unfamiliarity with "the arena," Carol countered the direction of the meeting when she asked the candidate to address issues of education, rather than marketing and public relations. Carol was the only one in this meeting to "speak up" in this way, and her seemingly simple inquiry caused a very important meeting to change course, possibly impacting the future of the school district in a significant way.

   There were many emotional abilities that Carol used in this incident, and some of these were explored in previous sections. She demonstrated an ability to accurately perceive her own emotions and the emotions of others; she demonstrated an understanding of how organizational events impact feelings, behaviors, and relate to human psychological needs; and she was able to manage a range of diverse and potent emotions. However, Carol's strong commitment to her personal values and the core values of the organization also contributed to her emergence as a highly effective school psychologist leader.

   Carol was inspired and guided by her values, which inevitably led her to proactively insert herself into uncomfortable, and potentially risky situations. Her willingness to take personal risks, in the service of her values, actually created opportunities for her to "flex" her emotional intelligence abilities. Her ability to manage her emotions and the

willingness to experience feelings, both pleasant and unpleasant, became more doable because of her firm commitment to the cause. In the end, having emotional intelligence is important in order to be an effective school psychologist. Having emotional intelligence *and* a clear commitment to personal and organizational values are required in order to be a highly effective school psychology leader.

**Mary.** A strong commitment to the organization's core goals, and to values such as caring and concern for others, also helped Mary respond effectively to a crisis situation and contributed to her emergence as a school psychologist leader in her community. As was discussed in a previous section, a principal of one of the schools within her district suffered a sudden stroke in the parking lot of the school and died about one month later. The event was traumatic and launched a community into crisis. In previous sections I explored how Mary's emotional intelligence helped her to deal effectively with the situation. However, it was Mary's passionate commitment to values such as caring and concern for the community that led her to assume a leadership position, helped her to navigate the complexities of the crisis, and ultimately enabled her to respond to the needs of the community.

When Mary was first notified about the principal's stroke, she took immediate and selfless responsibility for the daunting task that lay ahead of her. Reflecting her personal value of caring and concern for others, Mary commented, "…emotionally, I needed to realize that this is on me. This is really happening…and there's nobody else in the district that can handle the situation." The needs of the community came first for Mary, and she said, "I don't think I even had a moment to feel sad…I just needed to slap myself in the face, regroup and then get everybody else organized." Mary had not dealt with a crisis

this large and she was overwhelmed.  However,  Mary's extraordinary concern for the

well being of the community, in addition to her ability to manage her emotions, was

enormously helpful at the initial stages of the crisis response.  Her deep caring for the

community, as well as her emotional intelligence, enabled her to conduct highly detailed

emotional reconnaissance activities in the community.  The information she gathered was

critical for decision-making and meeting the diverse needs of the community members.

An additional incident within this larger crisis highlights how a clear commitment to

values of caring and concern for others helped Mary when she needed to deliver a speech to the

entire school community.  On her way home after the day of the principal's stroke, Mary began

thinking ahead and planning how she would address the community the following morning,

which she forecasted was "going to be the worst day."  There was significant pressure on Mary

leading up to this meeting, and she noted that at the morning meeting there would be

approximately 60 staff members, the vice principal, an interim superintendent, and Mary's

supervisor.  Mary recalls the stress and pressure that resulted from the realization that "…all

these people are looking at you…and the weight is entirely on you."  Mary's caring and concern

for others helped her rise to the occasion, and "as uncomfortable as I felt in that moment," Mary

recalls thinking, "I knew that's what I have to do."

As Mary's discussion about this incident came to a close, she summed up her thoughts in

a way that spoke to both her emotional intelligence abilities, as well as her commitment to caring

for the well being of others.  "I think people get into administrative roles and kind of forget

where they came from…forget about the needs of the people that are around them.  But for me

that always stays front and center.  It's awareness about considering everybody else, and their

feelings and how they can react…"  Mary is a school psychologist who is deeply committed to

caring for the needs of her community.  A commitment to these values enabled her to effectively respond to very challenging situations and helped her emerge as an informal leader.

Carol and Mary's steadfast commitment to values such as caring for the organizations and communities they served helped them to be not only highly effective school psychologists, but also respected leaders.  Because of these values, they often inserted themselves into complicated and challenging situations.  Their values, together with strong emotional intelligence abilities, enabled them to successfully navigate complicated and emotionally intense situations, provide leadership, and make meaningful contributions to the people around them and the organizations they served.

## Discussion

This exploratory study focused on how several highly effective school psychologist leaders used emotional intelligence abilities to deal with challenging situations and achieve important goals within their organizations.  Interest in emotional intelligence (EI) has grown during the last two decades, and has been examined in a variety of contexts including education, health, personal relationships, social adjustment, and work.  A growing body of research also confirms the unique role that emotional intelligence plays in effective leadership (Cherniss, 2006).  Outstanding school psychologists have historically acted as informal leaders; however, in the past several years leadership has formally been recognized as an important theme within the professional field of school psychology (Bass, 2013 & 2014).

During the research interviews the school psychologist participants were asked to talk about challenging incidents they had recently experienced.  The investigator specifically asked the participants to think of situations that occurred at the organizational level, as opposed to individual encounters during counseling sessions with students or even with teachers.  The types

of incidents they shared included contentious Child Study Team meetings, large-scale crisis

interventions, program-planning meetings, and high-stakes meetings with candidates for senior

level positions.  These interviews were conducted in a way that sought to understand how the

school psychologists used the following four core emotional intelligence abilities to deal with

challenges: (1) accurately perceiving and expressing emotions, (2) using emotions to facilitate

thought, decision making, and effective action, (3) understanding emotions and how they can

change, and (4) managing their own emotions and the emotions of others.  While the interviews

focused on these abilities, an additional and unanticipated theme emerged.  Two of the school

psychologists in particular showed how a strong commitment to organizational goals, as well as

values of caring and concern, related both to EI and to leadership.  Through their descriptions of

challenging incidents, and how they responded, these emotional intelligence abilities were

"brought to life" and enable us to gain insight into how the abilities can be applied in real-life

situations.

**The Use of the Four Core Emotional Abilities**

The four core emotional intelligence abilities were important and played a unique role in

helping the school psychologists deal effectively with challenging situations in order to achieve

goals.  Accurately perceiving and expressing emotions is the first of the four core emotional

intelligence abilities.  One noticeable observation was that the school psychologists were keenly

aware of their own and others' emotions, and they were also able to forecast how others may

react to certain situations and triggers.  Beyond having an accurate perception of emotions, they

also skillfully expressed emotions in ways that influenced others and promoted their goals.

In one incident, for example, Sam wanted a mental health clinician to reconsider her

approach to a program she was developing, but to do so in a way that did not undermine her hard

work or jeopardize their relationship.  In another incident, Jackie, who had recently assumed a new administrative role, wanted to establish an authoritative relationship with a teacher, but at the same time be perceived as supportive and caring.  Sam and Jackie achieved their goals in these incidents, both of which involved critiquing and setting limits with a supervisee, by first identifying and acknowledging their own feelings.  In order to achieve their goals, they both found it necessary to express candidly their disapproval, which induced discomfort and negative emotions in a subordinate.  For both of them, however, the "critique" was nested in an empathic, respectful, and caring relationship, which increased receptivity and helped with the maintenance of positive relationships.  Sam and Jackie's approach to delivering criticism also demonstrated that when inducing discomfort, it needs to be done sensitively, coupled with emotional expressions that increase pleasant feelings without minimizing the importance of the message.

The second EI ability investigated in this study was how the school psychologists used their emotions to facilitate thought, guide decision-making, and take effective action.  The idea that feelings, if approached skillfully, can enhance thinking and decision-making is a departure from long held beliefs that decision-making is an entirely rational process and that emotions are an obstacle to thinking (Cherniss, 2006).  The school psychologists in this study approached strong emotions as "alerts," that drew their attention to matters of importance.  They "listened in" to their emotional experiences, which enabled them to prioritize thinking and helped with decision-making.  It is common that people respond to aversive and uncomfortable emotions with avoidance, distraction, or, in a good case, tolerance.  These school psychologists, on the other hand, made room for and embraced their feelings, and they accessed the information embedded within them in order to make helpful decisions.  Mary, for example, used the information in her feelings to evaluate the best way to support an anxious teacher.  Randy's

feelings of anxiety and suspicion towards a colleague helped him see that he needed to resist his inclinations to be flexible and warm and instead set clear boundaries.

The third emotional intelligence ability explored in this study was the school psychologists' ability to understand emotions and how they can change. Mayer and Salovey (1997) discuss different sub-skills within this ability such as understanding the causes of emotions and their relationship to human psychological needs, the relationships between emotions and how and why they can change from one feeling to another, and how emotions lead to behaviors. The two school psychologists discussed in the Results, Carol and Mary, used some or all of these skills to conceptualize crisis situations better and to understand how changes move through a system and impact people's feelings and behavior. This ability helped them respond effectively to complicated and challenging situations.

Two additional themes emerged from the research interviews with these particular school psychologists. The first is that they believed that emotions are very important and it is, therefore, vital to understand the feelings of their colleagues and the members of their communities. A second, and related observation is that they actively conducted "emotional reconnaissance" and looked for evidence of how events are impacting the thoughts, emotions, and behaviors of others. Mary used these abilities to support a community that experienced a trauma triggered by the sudden stroke of a beloved school principal. Carol's understanding of the causes of emotions, and how they relate to human needs for security and self-preservation, helped her to influence a high-stakes meeting.

Managing one's own emotions, and the emotions of others is the final EI ability that was explored in this study, which Mayer and Salovey define as "…the conscious regulation of emotions to enhance emotional and intellectual growth" (Mayer & Salovey; 1997, p. 14). This

study revealed how emotional management helped the school psychologists enhance their intellectual capacities so that they could achieve important goals. The ability to manage one's own emotions, and the emotions of others, is a critical emotional intelligence ability. As Cherniss (2006) points out in his research on emotional intelligence and leadership, high levels of stress can arrest intellectual functioning and reduce one's ability to handle information. A compromised ability to manage one's emotions in stressful situations can thus greatly reduce one's effectiveness.

In studying how the psychologists managed their emotions in these challenging incidents, two types of strategies emerged. Some school psychologists, such as Renee and Jackie, primarily discussed strategies that they used to prepare for situations they anticipated would be challenging. They found that planning ahead and mapping out an action plan helped them maintain their composure when they encountered the actual stressors. In addition, they also managed their emotions proactively by seeking out support from colleagues and trusted peers. Collaborating with others gave them opportunities to "talk things out" and get feedback.

Other school psychologists, such as Carol and Randy, focused mostly on emotional management strategies that they used while in the middle of challenging incidents, the second type of strategy that was observed. The ability to manage emotions in the "heat of the moment" is a valuable and rare skill. Randy showed how, paradoxically, being open and accepting of emotions, rather than trying to push them away, was actually a helpful way to manage them. Carol demonstrated a unique ability to simultaneously be emotionally engaged with her surroundings, and at the same time detached from the emotion so that she could reflect on her feelings, evaluate their utility, and then make a contribution that was consistent with her and the school district's values.

It is noteworthy that the emotional management strategies used by Randy and Carol are also consistent with approaches found in other theoretical frameworks, such as Acceptance & Commitment Therapy (ACT) and Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), both of which are included in the "third wave" of Cognitive Behavioral Treatments (CBT) (Dimeff & Linehan, 2001; Harris, 2006). For example, ACT teaches a number of different skills relating to emotions and sensations, such as "acceptance," "cognitive defusion," and "contact with the present moment." These skills help an individual "make room" for emotions and gain distance from them (defusion), in order to increase psychological flexibility, enabling one to behave in a "valued directed manner," an additional core principle of ACT.

**Combining emotional intelligence abilities.** In this study, the core EI abilities were analyzed as separate and discreet, which was helpful for organization and clarity. However, when actually dealing with challenging incidents, these school psychologists excelled in their ability to create a "symphony" of EI abilities. The skillful combining of abilities is what accounted for their success in performing under stressful circumstances. Carol and Randy, for example, highlighted how the EI abilities were used in specific sequences, and also how certain skills actually supported and enhanced other abilities.

Carol demonstrated using EI abilities in a progressive sequence when she was asked what she did to manage her emotions during a high-stakes meeting. Carol's first step was trying "to understand what that emotional reaction is," which represented her attempt to accurately perceive her emotions. She then moved to "why you might be having" particular feelings such as agitation, which reflected her ability to understand emotions and why she was experiencing them. Finally, Carol needed to decide, "what you want to do with" the emotions, which pointed to her ability to manage her emotions by detaching and reflecting on them. Interestingly, Carol

said that the most helpful way to inhibit an "unregulated expression of emotion" was to be "extremely thoughtful…about what the impact's going to be," and how others may respond emotionally to his comment. In other words, Carol found that using the ability to understand emotions, a separate EI ability, enhanced emotional management.

Randy also showed how emotionally intelligent individuals combine EI abilities in a way that leads to successful action. His process began with noticing and "perceiving" uncomfortable emotions, such as those he felt when dealing with the "heavy handed" assistant to the director of special services. Randy then described how he managed his anxiety and irritation through being open and accepting of the unpleasant experiences. After managing his emotions by "being" with them, he was then able to pay attention to them and use the information embedded within them to guide his thinking and decision-making.

In sum, these school psychologists seamlessly and skilfully combined the core EI abilities to deal with such challenges as managing difficult yet important relationships, and making risky and highly valuable comments at a high-stakes meeting. Furthermore, they integrated these different skills in ways that enhanced their job performance at crucial moments.

**Role of Commitment and Personal Values**

The final section of the results explored a theme that emerged in a particularly salient way during from the interviews with Mary and Carol. Mary led a crisis response, which affected hundreds of members in her community. Carol courageously made a decisive comment at a high-stakes meeting that immediately impacted the people around her, but also may have influenced an important hiring decision, thus having repercussions for the larger system. These school psychologists were strongly committed to the well-being of the organizations in which they functioned, and were constantly motivated by values of caring and concern, both for

individuals and the organization.  Most people with whom they worked would likely agree that

they are caring and concerned for others and seek to benefit the systems in which they work.

What was it about these individuals that set them apart?  For one, their commitment to these

values was steadfast and firm.  They also were proactive in that they sought out opportunities to

consciously apply these values to benefit their environments.  A final reason, which relates to

emotional intelligence, is that these school psychologists maintained their values, even in

situations that were complex, emotionally charged, and involved taking personal risks.

Their commitment to the organization's goals and to deeply held values of caring, and

their emotional intelligence, were interrelated and reciprocal.  On one hand, in order to be

effective during these challenging incidents, they needed well-honed EI abilities in order to

manage the challenges and stressors at play.  On the other hand, their firm commitment "to the

cause" made them more willing to enter into and endure challenging emotional situations.  The

combination of strong EI abilities and a steadfast commitment to values enabled them to be not

only highly effective school psychologists but also leaders in their communities.

**The Role of Emotional Intelligence and Leadership Emergence among School Psychologists**

This study explored how school psychology leaders deal with emotion in their day-to-day

work and how they used emotional intelligence to increase their leadership effectiveness.  The

incidents that the school psychologists shared, and how they used emotional intelligence to deal

with challenges, reflects much of what the literature on EI and leadership has discovered.  A

number of researchers proposed that leadership is ultimately about the ability to influence others

(Zaccaro, 2002). The extent to which leaders are able to influence others depends on the manner

and extent to which they successfully use EI abilities, such as managing their own emotions and

the emotions of group members (Cherniss, 2006).  Accurately perceiving their own emotions and

the emotions of others, understanding the relationship between events and feelings, and accurately and effectively expressing emotions to induce comfort and discomfort, are examples of how possessing and using well-developed EI abilities can influence others. However, most of the school psychologists in this study can be considered "informal" or "emergent" leaders who assumed leadership roles even though they did not have access to formal power, such as organizational punishments or rewards, that formal leaders possess (Pescosolido, 2002). For these individuals, emotional intelligence helped them develop the relationships with others that eventually enabled them to emerge as formal leaders.

**The importance of the "prehistory".** It is important to note that the interviews focused on incidents that had recently occurred; they did not directly seek to understand the history and background that preceded and set the stage for these incidents. Reflecting Pescosolido's (2002) discussion of EI and informal leadership, these school psychologists likely used their EI abilities in ways that contributed to their building of trusting relationships over time.

In Mary's case, she did not simply "arrive on the scene" and lead a large-scale crisis response. This invitation resulted from the many relationships she had developed during her nine years in the district. The need to build trust was especially important in her district, because, as she shared, "…that's the way it is in our community. People don't welcome you and accept you so easily…and that's one reason why it's very difficult for people from the outside to get things done here." Mary's emergence as a trusted leader was probably due to a number of factors including her knowledge and skill, deep caring, and her emotional intelligence abilities.

Reflecting on the incidents that the school psychologists shared, it is likely that leadership emerged from a prehistory of trusting and caring relationships. The interactions they described,

and the way they dealt with challenging incidents, suggests that their use of EI abilities played an important role in nurturing these relationships.

**Emotional intelligence at the organizational level.** An additional important point that emerged from this study is that these school psychologists were skilled at staying in "role" and being "emotionally intelligent," not only in individual, controlled settings such as counseling sessions or even when consulting with a teacher. Their true leadership emerged as a result of their ability to utilize emotional intelligence when dealing with unpredictable, complex, and emotionally charged organizational issues. These types of situations, as those working in school settings know, are expected. For change agents, such as school psychology leaders, challenging and emotionally charged situations are part of the job description. Their effective use of emotional intelligence abilities, specifically at the organizational level, contributed to the leadership role they assumed, even if it others may not have overtly recognized it as such.

**The Role of Commitment to Personal Values in Leadership Emergence**

A noteworthy theme that emerged from this study is the importance of having a strong commitment to the well-being of the organization, its mission, and to personal values of care and concern. In the Results section and in the beginning of this Discussion section I explored the reciprocal relationship between emotional intelligence abilities and personal values of caring and concern, and how the two influenced and supported one another. Their commitment to personal values also contributed to the school psychologists' emergence as leaders in their communities.

One link between values and leadership is that these school psychologists believed, and sincerely appreciated, the importance of identifying and understanding how members of their communities were feeling, especially in reaction to traumatic events and significant organizational changes. This recognition led them to proactively try to understand these

feelings, in order to meet the communities' needs and influence organizational processes.  Isen (1987) discusses the importance of a leader accurately appraising group members' emotions, and how possessing this knowledge increases the likelihood of influencing others and achieving goals.  Carol and Mary learned about the feelings of others by conducting "emotional reconnaissance."   These activities helped them to gather important emotional data, which they used to influence others, inspire colleagues to think differently, and as a result, nourished their leadership roles.

An additional link between EI, a commitment to values, and leadership was the school psychologists' readiness to take risks and experience discomfort when it reflected the values of the organization, when it served the needs of the community, and when it reflected their personal ideals.  By taking these risks, they allowed others to also reconnect with these values.  Trice and Beyer (1993) discuss how organizational identity and culture bind community members together through a shared and emotionally charged experience.  At times a community drifts from or loses site of these values.  This was the case when Carol's colleagues tolerated a potential school leader focusing on "marketing."  Carol's commitment to the value of education inspired her to risk alienation from a "future boss," yet helped remind her colleagues of their true mission.  Mary's community experienced being "lost" and confused as a result of the principal's sudden stroke.  Although she had not yet formed personal relationships with this faculty, she courageously, and effectively, addressed an emotionally raw community, and united them in a shared emotional experience. These school psychologists placed important values, such as emotional well-being and education, above their own personal comfort, and in doing so, reconnected those around them with matters of importance.  These bold actions, in turn, elevated them in the eyes of others and strengthened them as leaders.

There is one final way in which values connected to their emergence as community leaders. During the research interviews, Carol and Mary were asked how, and to what extent they believed that their performance in various incidents contributed to leadership. Neither of them, interestingly, appeared comfortable referring to themselves as "leaders." They preferred, rather, to acknowledge that being a leader was a secondary by-product of their prime mission, which was to serve and support others. Carol responded to a question about leadership by saying that most important for her was having an "…impact on the way people might think or approach a problem or situation. And I try to inspire that… and in a funny sort of way, that ends up how I think about it more than as leadership." Being a "leader" did not matter to Carol, but inspiring others did.

Mary also viewed leadership with discomfort and confided that, "I don't like to see all the attention on me." When asked about her role in the crisis response and how this impacted leadership, she admitted that the entire incident did, indeed, make her more known and public. For Mary, the real value of being a leader was that, "I just like to see things change and happen…and now I am able to push some things through." During her years in this district, Mary had risen to an administrative role, but she recognized that an inherent liability in moving up the hierarchy is that people "…kind of forget where they came from…forget about the needs of the people that are around them." Mary's emotional intelligence and personal values saved her from this pitfall. "For me," Mary concluded, "that always stays front and center. It's awareness about considering everybody else, and their feelings…"

Emotional intelligence and a strong commitment to personal values are two components that work together to produce leadership. Having clear values enabled the school psychologists to take risks and emerge as community leaders. Paradoxically, we can also learn from Carol and

Mary that the most influential informal leaders may be those that actually avoid the "honor" or attention that leadership attracts.

**Leadership and Influencing Others by Modeling Emotional Intelligence**

Another noteworthy idea that emerged from this study is the importance of modeling behaviors reflecting emotional intelligence; and how behaving in an emotionally intelligent way affects the feelings and behaviors of others. This outcome is supported by the research of Barsade (2002) on "emotional contagion," which she describes as, "a process in which a person or group influences the emotions or behavior of another person or group through the conscious or unconscious induction of emotion states and behavioral attitudes" (p.646). Barsade describes people as "walking mood inductors," who continually influence the feelings, and then the judgments and behaviors of others. The idea of "emotional contagion," therefore, has important implications for school psychologist leaders, who, through the use of EI abilities can influence how people feel and behave.

Carol, for example, articulated in a salient way how modeling EI abilities, over time, during such activities as team meetings, can impact the emotional tone of the environment, increase receptivity and the likelihood of influencing others, and even shape the behaviors of others. At the very beginning of the research interview, prior to discussing a specific incident, Carol commented:

> It's important for me to manage my emotions at meetings…for a number of different
> reasons, and to be perceived as listening, and as a listener. Because embedded in
> listening is empathy…and conveying empathy. And when you have that connection, you
> have much greater receptivity. So at many, many, many meetings, I won't say
> anything…at least for most of the meeting. If I demonstrate how important it is to listen,

not only will that be modeling, but people will listen much more carefully when I do get

around to saying something.  And it turns out, that when I spend lots of time listening and

taking things in, eventually they turn to me and say, 'What do you think about all of

this?'  And my contribution is often about how can we look at this from a different

perspective.

There are a number of important points included in this statement that relate to the idea of

emotional contagion and leadership.  One is the recognition that listening can be an emotional

activity that "conveys empathy."  When one manages their emotions in order to refrain from

speaking, and instead focuses their energies on understanding others, the emotional "mood" of a

group is affected.  A second point is that when one models empathy through listening, others also

can learn to become better listeners, a skill that increases their ability to be empathic.  Third,

Carol is saying that people seem to listen most carefully to those who take listening seriously,

and through this process an emotional connection is established.  In the end, establishing this

connection helps others to be more receptive to your ideas, and open to your influence, which is,

after all, a defining feature of leadership.  Carol certainly confirmed the power that this approach

has when she applied it to the high-stakes meeting with the final candidate.  Over time, one way

in which Carol assumed an influential leadership role was by expressing her emotional

intelligence through a seemingly simple act: listening.

One important lesson learned from the school psychologists in this study is the power that

consistently behaving in an emotionally intelligent way can have.  It is not only while in the grips

of a challenging situation that a school psychologist can use emotional intelligence.  Rather,

emotional intelligence is a way of "being": something of a disposition.  By persistently modeling

emotional intelligence, across settings and in different situations, the school psychologist can

have a potent influence on the feelings and behaviors of others, where they, too, can become more emotionally intelligent. Influencing others through modeling emotionally intelligent behaviors, is indeed, an important form of informal leadership.

**Practical Implications of the Study**

The importance and relevance of emotional intelligence in the workplace has been well researched. Likewise, research on EI has been shown to be an important component for effective leadership (Cherniss, 2006). During the past several years, organizations such as the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) have placed leadership development as an important agenda (Bass, 2013 & 2014). There is a growing awareness that school psychologists are trained in many skills that are vital when engaging in systems-level initiatives, such as Positive Behavior Interventions & Supports (PBIS) programs, the adherence to evidence-based practices, and implementation science in public school settings (Horner, 2012). School psychologists have become key personnel in the development and implementation of school-wide social and emotional learning (SEL) initiatives, and researchers have explicitly identified the link between leadership skills and the success of such SEL programs  (Elias, O'Brien, & Weissberg, 2006).

School psychologists who possess and apply emotional intelligence abilities are more likely to effectively navigate the challenges inherent in systems-level changes, such as those mentioned above. This exploratory study confirms the importance of EI abilities, and demonstrates how effective school psychology leaders used these abilities to deal with challenges. The outcomes of this study suggest that students in school psychology programs would benefit from explicit training in the area of emotional intelligence, which will help them effectively deal with the challenges and opportunities of organizational change.

One way to accomplish this goal is to integrate the subject of emotional intelligence into existing courses, specifically those that focus on program implementation and organizational change. In addition to teaching the technical aspects of implementation science and systems level programming, attention will be given to the role of emotional intelligence when participating in, and leading program implementation. An additional way to introduce EI training explicitly into school psychology programs is to increase student exposure to effective school psychologists, with the purpose of learning how EI has helped them as practitioners and leaders. This could be accomplished by inviting them as guest speakers in relevant courses, or by having graduate students interview these school psychologists through the lenses of EI, similar to what was done in this dissertation. Finally, school psychology programs can design and provide students with activities in which they need to consider the "human" and "emotional" challenges that school psychologists encounter, and how EI abilities can be helpful in conceptualizing and navigating these situations.

**Limitations of the Study**

There are several factors that limit the generalizability, utility, and overall qualitative depth of this study. The sample size of this case study was small (N=6), which enabled an in-depth and concrete understanding of how school psychologists actually used emotional intelligence abilities. The small sample size, however, limits the reliability of the outcomes and their generalizability. An additional factor that may limit the generalizability of this study was the cultural and ethnic diversity among the participants, as none of the school psychologists were from a minority group. All participants were also from the Northeastern United States, and the use of EI abilities may manifest differently in other regions of the US. While the lessons learned

from this study were important, there are limits regarding the extent to which the behaviors and attitudes of these school psychologists represent a larger population.

There were also several biases that may have impacted the reliability of this study. One bias was that the participants had prior knowledge of the study, and that its goal was to understand how they used emotional intelligence in challenging situations. While there was an ethical responsibility to inform the participants regarding the purpose of the study, this may have biased them into providing responses that fulfilled the goal of the study, rather than reporting how incidents actually occurred and how they responded. In addition, since the participants knew the investigator, a desire to "help" may have biased the reliability of the information.

A final bias resulted from personal relationships the investigator had with most of the participants. A prior relationship may have influenced them to share, withhold, or modify certain information. On the other hand, the personal relationship may have also been a factor that contributed to them sharing rich and candid data. A level of comfort and trust, as well as knowledge about them and their settings, enabled a quality and depth of data that a relative "stranger" may not have accessed.

One final limitation relates to the investigator's own "learning curve" regarding emotional intelligence. The investigator's knowledge of EI increased and deepened, especially during the process of analyzing the data, which helped him to retroactively analyze and understand the data through the lenses of EI. However, a nascent understanding of EI may have negatively impacted the quality of the data. Although the investigator had the requisite knowledge to conduct interviews, which produced rich data, a stronger grasp of EI concepts may have enabled an interview style that probed for more specific information about the role of certain EI abilities.

**Summary**

Leaders are individuals in systems that inspire others and influence change. Outstanding school psychologists often emerge in their organizations as leaders, both formal, and more commonly, informal. The primary goal of this study was to understand the role that emotional intelligence played in how the participating school psychologists used EI to deal with challenging situations, and how EI contributed to their emergence as leaders.

One outcome of the study is that the school psychologists confirmed the relevance and centrality of the four core abilities included in the Mayer-Salovey model of emotional intelligence. Furthermore, the study also revealed several additional important aspects to emotional intelligence. One observation was that emotional intelligence for these school psychologists was not simply a set of tools, but it was a disposition, which they consistently carried with them, regardless of the context. They showed that EI has important implications not only during high stress, challenging situations, but also during more routine interactions with colleagues, superiors, and subordinates. An additional observation was that the use of emotional intelligence abilities alone does not make leaders. Rather, it is the combination of emotional intelligence with a clear and fervent commitment to values of caring and concern that produces leaders.

Although the role of emotional intelligence for students in school psychology programs is not frequently addressed explicitly, this study suggests that increasing its prominence may improve the quality of training, and prepare students to be future school psychology leaders.

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Appendix A

Protocol for Critical Incident Interview

## Part 1: Introduction

1. **Describe purpose of study**

   a. "This is a study of how school psychologists in leadership roles deal with emotion, their own and others, and how they use emotion in their work as leaders – either formal or informal."

   b. "I plan to write a dissertation on the role of emotion and emotional intelligence among school psychology leaders. I hope to use this knowledge to help other school psychologists increase their effectiveness."

   c. "Questions?"

   d. Have participant sign consent form.

2. **Background**

   a. Role in organization?

   b. How long in present job? How long with this organization?

   c. With whom do you work typically?

## Part 2: Critical Incidents Involving Emotion – General

- Initial question: "Now I'd like you to take a minute to think of an incident that occurred in the last week or so in which you managed or used emotion (yours and others) to deal with a problem or achieve a goal… OK, can you describe one to me?" (If participant has trouble with the time frame, add, "What about an incident that occurred within the last month or so?")

- Try to get what happened just before the incident occurred or the context, how the incident ended, and the ultimate outcomes, as well as the sequence of events during the incident.

- If necessary, provide help with choosing the incident. Remind them that we're looking for incidents in which they had to manage their own emotions or those of others, inspire and motivate others, or deal with relationship problems. You can also tell them that typical situations are child study team meetings; interactions with highly emotional and/or agitated faculty or parents; or situations surrounding the introduction of an innovation.

- If an incident doesn't sound useful, say, "That sounds interesting, but what I'm looking for is an incident where the outcome was influenced by how you handled or used emotion – yours and others' …Can you think of one like that?"

- After they describe the incident in enough detail, follow up with *probes* asking the person how they used the core EI abilities. Some examples of probes to use are:

  1. Identifying and understanding emotions

     a. Before and during that incident, what emotions were you feeling? Why do you think you felt that way?

     b. What emotions were the others feeling? How aware were you of how they were feeling? Why do you think they were feeling that way?

  2. Expressing and using emotions

     a. Did you use your emotions or others' emotions to influence the process or outcome, either consciously or unconsciously? If so, how?

     b. Did you express your emotions at any point during the incident? If so, what impact did that seem to have or did you want it to have?

  3. Managing own and others' emotions

     a. How did you try to manage your own emotions to influence the outcome?

     b. How did you try to manage the others' emotions to influence the outcome?

- If you don't seem to be getting useful material after the person describes the incident and you make some probes, go on to another incident.  It's better to cover more incidents during the interview than to spend a lot of extra time on an incident that doesn't produce much additional useful data.

- Try to repeat for one or two more incidents.

**Part 4: Closing**

> Show appreciation for the contribution the participant has made.  Answer any questions they might have.