

**EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND PERSONALITY PREDICT THE LEADERSHIP PRACTICES OF FUTURE MUSLIM LEADERS**

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**ABSTRACT**

Despite a growing number of studies focused on the emotional intelligence and leadership of professional working groups, the construct of emotional intelligence has received little attention in literature related to undergraduate leadership development. This study investigates the influence of personality traits and emotional intelligence on the leadership of future Muslim leaders. The main objective of this study is to assess the incremental validity of emotional intelligence over the personality factors in predicting leadership practices. Data were collected from 710 Muslim undergraduate students who constitute future leaders. Results from regression analysis, particularly the relative weight analysis, reveal that emotional intelligence demonstrated significant incremental variance with leadership practices beyond the personality traits. The implications of the findings for research and practice are discussed.

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**Keywords:** *Future Muslim Leaders; Young Leaders; Emotional Intelligence; Leadership Practices; Personality*

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**INTRODUCTION**

By 2020, Malaysia aims to be a fully developed country, with a confident Malaysian society, infused by strong moral and ethical values, living in a democratic, economically just and equitable, progressive and prosperous society (Mohamad, 1991). Inspired by the idea of Vision 2020, it is hoped that Malaysians born today and in the years to come will be the last generation to live in a 'developing' country. According to Mohamad (1991), to achieve this ultimate objective Malaysia should not only be developed in the economic sense, it must be a nation that is fully developed in every sense, economically, politically, socially, spiritually, psychologically and culturally. Thus, by 2020, Malaysia should be able to produce a knowledgeable, productive, proactive and multi-skilled generation.

However, recently it was revealed that the current undergraduate students are lacking in soft skills competency including lack of critical thinking skills, social competency skills, interpersonal communication skills and leadership skills (Ridhwan, 2013). Educationists assert that today's generation are the future leaders and mastering soft skills particularly leadership skills is important in this 21st century as it will contribute to the development and modernization of the country (Baba, 2013). Meanwhile, the Minister of Higher Education Malaysia stated that the graduates do not meet the current work demands as they are lacking in four essential soft skills, namely communication skills, leadership skills, creative thinking skills as well as professional ethics (S Anand, 2010). It is worth noting that leadership skills are important to undergraduate students who constitute the future workforce and leaders; thus, continuing the current situation risks failing to achieve Vision 2020. There is therefore a pressing need to identify the factors that can enhance the soft skills of Malaysia's future leaders.

Emotional intelligence is currently a popular topic among leadership researchers (Cavazotte, Moreno, & Hickmann, 2012; Gooty, Connelly, Griffith, & Gupta, 2010; Harms & Credé, 2010a). The term "emotional intelligence" was formally coined by the American psychologists Peter Salovey and John D. Mayer (1990). They

define it as “the ability to monitor one’s own and others’ feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and actions” (p. 189). The later definition proposed by Mayer and Salovey (1997) conceptualized EI as the ability to deal with emotion perception, emotion understanding, emotion facilitation, and emotion regulation. The initial conception of EI as an ability to resolve emotional problems has recently been characterized as an ability-based emotional intelligence model. The founders perceive their model as a “cognitive ability” or “information-processing” approach, and tend to correlate highly with general mental ability (Brackett, Rivers & Salovey, 2011; Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 1999; Mayer, Roberts & Barsade, 2008).

### **The Construct of Emotional Intelligence**

The emotional intelligence concept has gained immense popularity across a variety of disciplines because of the belief that emotional intelligence can predict life success above and beyond that predicted by cognitive intelligence (Goleman, 1995a). The ‘big idea’ behind the initial emergence of emotional intelligence as a construct is that success in life and work depends on more than just the basic intellectual abilities measured by IQ tests (Cherniss, 2010; Goleman, 1995a; Kaplan, Cortina & Ruark, 2010; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Emotional intelligence became an increasingly popular topic in the media after the publication of Goleman’s (1995b) best-selling trade book, “Emotional intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ”. The book has attracted the attention of the media, the general public and researchers alike since its content revealed information about the discovery of emotional competencies and prosocial behavior.

A substantial amount of research has revealed that emotional intelligence is a significant predictor of important educational, workplace and social success beyond what can be predicted by general mental abilities measured by IQ tests. A few studies for example, have revealed that EI has been found to be positively correlated to the academic achievement of college students (Gil-Olarte, Martin, & Brackett, 2006; Rivers et al., 2012). In relation to social functioning, other researchers have found that emotional intelligence has significantly accounted for the quality of social interactions and interpersonal relationships (Brackett, Rivers, Shiffman, Lerner, & Salovey, 2006; Rivers et al., 2012). At the organizational level, emotional intelligence has demonstrated a positive relationship with individual and team task performance (Carmeli & Josman, 2006) and leadership effectiveness (Cote, Lopes, Salovey, & Miners, 2010; Mittal & Sindhu, 2012).

### **Emotional Intelligence and Leadership**

In general, leadership refers to a process of social interaction whereby the leader’s ability to influence the behavior of their followers can further influence the job outcomes or group performance (Humphrey, 2002; Pirola-Merlo, Hartel, Mann, & Hirst, 2002). Past researchers claim that emotions play an important role in leadership (Antonakis, Ashkanasy, & Dasborough, 2009; Brackett et al., 2011; Dasborough, 2006; George, 2000; Kerr et al., 2006; Prati, Douglas, Ferris, Ammeter, & Buckley, 2003; Zhou & George, 2003). Humphrey (2002) asserted that leadership is intrinsically an emotion-laden process, whereby an effective leader is able to recognize emotional states, attempt to evoke emotions in teammates, and then seek to manage emotional states accordingly. On the other hand, Pescosolido (2002) agreed that leaders are also managers of group emotion, as effective leaders can increase team solidarity and morale by developing shared emotional experiences. The question then is if leadership, as a science, needs “emotional intelligence”, and do leaders really need emotional intelligence to succeed.

Further, Salovey, Bedell, Detweiler, and Mayer (1999) found that individuals who scored high in the ability to perceive accurately, understand, and appraise the emotions of others were better able to adapt to changes in their social environments and build supportive networks. This is true as high levels of emotional intelligence might enable a leader to better monitor how team members are feeling (Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 1999), which may lead to smoother interactions with the team members. In such a case, emotional intelligence plays a significant role in effective social interaction and this will lead to effective leadership especially in achieving certain collective goals. Hence emotional intelligence is a meaningful predictor of leadership effectiveness.

## Personality and Leadership

Personality refers to a pattern of relatively unique and stable characteristics that give both consistency and individuality to a person's behavior (J. Feist & G. Feist, 2009). Among the well-known theories of personality is the Big Five theories of personality traits that is dominated by the work of Goldberg (1990) and McCrae and Costa (1987, 1996). This theory postulates that there are five broad factors of human behavioral dispositions that provide a complete description of personality styles. The five personality factors refer to Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism traits or O, C, E, A, N.

Generally speaking, openness (sometimes called Intellect) includes traits such as being insightful, imaginative, curious, analytical, and intelligent (Goldberg, 1992; McCrae & Costa, 1996). Conscientiousness (also known as dependability) refers to traits associated with being organized, thorough, well planned, conscientious, and responsible. Meanwhile, extraversion encompasses behavioral tendencies such as being talkative, energetic, extraverted, and assertive. The agreeableness trait includes traits such as emphatic, sympathetic, cooperative, and agreeable. Finally, neuroticism (sometimes called emotional instability) captures traits such as tense, mood, anxiety, emotional instability, and discontent (Goldberg, 1992; McCrae & Costa, 1996).

Past research has revealed that personality, particularly extraversion and openness to experience demonstrated predictive validity in predicting leadership (Judge & Bono, 2000; McCrae & Costa, 1987; Ployhart, Lim & Chan, 2001; Strang & Kuhnert, 2009). Barrick and Mount (1991) in their meta-analysis found that other than extraversion and openness to experience, conscientiousness also correlates positively with leader performance, which may indicate that individuals who are dependable, persistent, goal-directed, and organized tend to perform well as leaders.

## SIGNIFICANCE OF AND MOTIVES FOR THE STUDY

This study is important as to date most research has focused on the emotional intelligence and leadership of professionals, practitioners, and managers (Cavazotte, Moreno & Hickmann, 2012; Clarke, 2010; Jordan & Troth, 2011; Kerr et al., 2006; Lam & O'Higgins, 2012; Mandell & Pherwani, 2003; Mittal & Sindhu, 2012; Ramo, Saris & Boyatzis, 2009), while little emotional intelligence research has focused on the emotional intelligence of tertiary students who constitute the future leaders (James, Bore, & Zito, 2012). Furthermore, Malaysian educationists assert that mastering soft skills, particularly leadership skills, is important in this 21st century as it will contribute to the development and modernization of the country (Baba, 2013). As today's generation will be the future leaders, in light of this lacuna, research focusing on emotional intelligence and leadership of tertiary students would be significant in realizing Malaysia's Vision 2020. Researching the emotional intelligence and leadership of the potential leaders is a strategic initiative to produce effective Muslim leaders.

## RESEARCH AIMS AND HYPOTHESES

The purpose of this study is manifold. First, it seeks to investigate the influence of personality traits and emotional intelligence on the leadership of future Muslim leaders. Second, it examines the incremental validity of emotional intelligence over the personality traits in predicting the leadership of future leaders. Incremental validity is used to describe the gain in validity resulting from adding a new predictor (EI) to existing predictors (personality) in predicting particular dependent variable (leadership practices). This means that in a model including both personality traits and emotional intelligence as predictors, emotional intelligence will account for a unique component of variance in leadership, beyond that which is accounted for by personality. Thus, this study is an attempt to understand what unique contribution emotional intelligence may add in explaining the leadership of potential Muslim leaders. This research develops the following hypotheses:

- H1: Openness to experience, conscientiousness and extraversion significantly predict the leadership practices of future leaders.
- H2: Emotional intelligence significantly predicts the leadership practices of future leaders.

H3: Emotional intelligence demonstrates evidence of incremental validity over the personality traits in predicting the leadership of future leaders.

## METHOD

### Participants and Procedure

In total, 710 undergraduate students ( $n = 710$ ) from one public university participated in this study. The participants completed the related instruments during extra co-curricular activity programs on a voluntary basis. The age of the respondents ranged from 19 to 26 years ( $M = 21.28$ ,  $SD = 1.193$ ). However, 65 respondents did not report their age. The respondents consisted of 39.8% male students ( $n = 282$ ) and 60.2% females ( $n = 427$ ). Meanwhile, 1 of the respondents did not indicate their gender. In addition, the sample comprised students from various faculties (Engineering, Human Sciences, Economics, Information Technology, Law, and Architecture). It is worth noting that all of the respondents were Muslim and ethnic Malay.

### Measures

Emotional intelligence. The Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS; Wong & Law, 2002) was used to examine respondents' emotional intelligence. The WLEIS gauges four dimensions of EI construct: (1) Appraisal/expression of emotion in the self; (2) Appraisal/recognition of emotion in others; (3) Regulation of emotion; and (4) Use of emotion to facilitate performance. It is a self-report measure that consists of 16 items and each factor consists of four items. An example of the item for 'self-emotional appraisal' factor is "I have a good understanding of my own emotions".

In this instrument, respondents are asked to indicate their level of agreement with particular statement using a seven-point Likert scale, with (1) indicating strongly disagree and (7) indicating strongly agree. The test developer reported the reliability estimates (coefficient alphas) for the four dimensions of self-emotion appraisal, use of emotion, regulation of emotion, and others's emotional appraisal are .89, .88, .76, and .85, respectively (Wong & Law, 2002).

Personality. The respondents also completed The Big Five Inventory (BFI-44; Benet-Martinez & John, 1998) The BFI-44 consisted of 44 items that measure Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness and Neuroticism (O, C, E, A, N) based on a 5-point scale which was ranging from disagree strongly (1) to agree strongly (5). The items commenced with a pre-statement *I see myself as someone who...* A typical example of the items is *...prefers work that is routine* (conscientiousness dimension).

This instrument was chosen because it provides a quick, reliable, and accurate measure of the five domains of personality and is particularly useful when time is limited and when global information on personality is needed (John & Srivastava, 1999). Benet-Martinez and John (1998) reported alpha coefficients of .88, .84, .79, .82 and .81, respectively, for the aforementioned dimensions.

Leadership practices. The respondents also completed a self-report measure of leadership practices known as the Student Leadership Practices Inventory second edition (SLPI; Kouzes & Posner, 2005). The SLPI is a leadership tool designed specifically for college/university students and young people, and developed based on one of the most prominent and well regarded leadership frameworks for youth leadership (Kouzes & Posner, 2008). These key behaviors are categorized into five leadership practices; (1) model the way; (2) inspire a shared vision; (3) challenge the process; (4) enable others to act and (5) encourage the heart. Each of these components is tapped through 6 items, making a total of 30 items.

In this instrument, respondents were asked to consider how frequently they engage in each of the behaviors using a five-point Likert scale, with (1) indicating rarely or seldom and (5) indicating very frequently or almost always. An example of an item for the SLPI is "I describe to others in our team what we should be capable of accomplishing" (Inspire a shared vision dimension). With regard to the psychometric properties of

the SLPI, Cronbach's alpha coefficients of internal reliability for each practice have been reported in the literature at .70 or greater (Posner, 2004).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To test hypotheses 1, 2 and 3, first, a pre-investigation on the correlation between the predictors and the leadership practices was carried out. Second, a hierarchical Multiple Regression analysis (MRA) was conducted to test whether emotional intelligence added significant incremental variance to leadership practices (Field, 2005; Green & Salkind, 2005). In addition to regression, relative weight analysis was also conducted to evaluate the unique contribution of emotional intelligence to the presence of personality (LeBreton & Tonidandel, 2008).

### Preliminary Investigation of the Correlations Between Predictors and Leadership

Prior to analyzing data, Exploratory Data Analysis (EDA) was conducted to check the normality of the data distribution and to detect outliers as well as multicollinearity (Green & Salkind, 2005). The result indicated that no violation was observed. Further, the correlation between the predictors and leadership practices was examined to ensure that all of the predictors were significantly related to the outcome variable before including them in the regression model. The correlation analysis found that all of the predictors were significantly correlated to leadership.

### Regression and Relative Weight Analyses

The regression model consisted of two predictors (personality and emotional intelligence) and one criterion variable (leadership). The baseline model (personality traits were entered as independent variable, then the focal emotional intelligence was entered into the equation (the incremental model) and the  $R^2$  changes were examined. The predictors were entered in blocks in the following order: Step 1: personality traits, namely openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism; and Step 2: emotional intelligence which consisted of self-emotional appraisal, other's emotional appraisal, regulation of emotion and use of emotion to facilitate performance dimension. The regression result showed that a significant effect of emotional intelligence on the leadership practices was obtained after controlling for personality traits. Table 1 summarises the results of hierarchical regression and relative weight analysis.

Table 1  
*Regression analyses predicting the future leaders' leadership*

Predictor	Change statistics					Coefficient		Relative weight
	$R^2$	Adjusted $R^2$	$R^2 \Delta$	$F\Delta$	Sig $F\Delta$	$\beta$	$p$	
<b>Step 1</b>								
<b>Personality</b>	.321	.316	.321	66.55	.000			
Openness						.321**	.000	39.97
Conscientiousness						.120*	.001	6.96
Extraversion						.112*	.001	3.60
Agreeableness						.134**	.000	14.09
Neuroticism						.053	.164	1.09
<b>Step 2</b>								
<b>Emotional intelligence</b>	.372	.367	.051	57.27	.000	.272**	.00	34.29

Notes:

\*denotes significant at  $p < .05$  level.

\*\*denotes significant at  $p < .01$  level.

In step 1, personality traits significantly predicted leadership practices (Model 1:  $R = .567$ ,  $R^2 = .321$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = .316$ ,  $F\Delta (5, 704) = 66.55$ ,  $p = .000$ ). After entry of emotional intelligence in step 2, the regression equation result showed that the addition of the emotional intelligence significantly added an incremental

variance to the prediction of leadership practices above and beyond personality (Model 2:  $R = .610$ ,  $R^2 = .372$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = .367$ ,  $F_{\Delta}(41, 703) = 57.27$ ,  $p = .000$ ). With the significant  $F_{\Delta}$ , the  $R^2_{\Delta}$  of .051 indicated that emotional intelligence added a significant incremental variance on leadership practices while controlling the personality traits.

An investigation of the standardized beta coefficients ( $\beta$ ) for the MRA model was further scrutinized to investigate which variables were making a significant contribution in explaining the variance in the leadership practices across individuals. In the final model, the coefficient output revealed a significant positive association between openness to experience and leadership ( $\beta = .321$ ,  $p = .000$ ), conscientiousness trait and leadership ( $\beta = .120$ ,  $p = .001$ ), extraversion trait and leadership ( $\beta = .112$ ,  $p = .001$ ), and agreeableness trait and leadership ( $\beta = .134$ ,  $p = .000$ ) were obtained when the effects of other predictors were held constant. Thus, openness, conscientiousness, extraversion and agreeableness were significant predictors to the leadership.

Similarly, the standardized beta coefficient result also indicated that emotional intelligence significantly predicted leadership when the effects of other predictors were held constant ( $\beta = .272$ ,  $p = .000$ ). It revealed that emotional intelligence was also a significant predictor to leadership.

In addition to hierarchical regression, relative weight analysis was conducted to examine the exact amount of unique contribution emotional intelligence makes to the outcome variable (leadership) in the presence of personality. While the former is a conventional tool to assess incremental validity, the latter is a recent technique used to examine the relative contribution each predictor uniquely makes in explaining the outcome variable to the total explained variance of a criterion variable (LeBreton, Hargis, Griepentrog, Oswald, & Ployhart, 2007; LeBreton & Tonidandel, 2008). The results of the relative weight analysis revealed that openness to experience trait and emotional intelligence were among the strongest predictors to leadership as they explained 39.97% and 34.29% of the variance in leadership practices respectively (See Table 2). This was followed by the agreeableness trait which explained 14.09% and the conscientiousness trait which explained 6.96% of the outcome variable.

## DISCUSSION

Hypothesis 1 hypothesized that personality factors particularly openness to experience, conscientiousness and extraversion traits significantly predict leadership practices. The hierarchical regression result showed that these personality traits were significant predictors of leadership. Thus, hypothesis 1 was supported. Meanwhile, the relative weight analysis indicated that among these personality traits, openness to experience was the best predictor of leadership. This finding was consistent with the previous studies which highlighted that openness to experience, conscientiousness and extraversion significantly predict leadership performance (Barrick & Mount, 2001; Ployhart et al., 2001). The emergence of openness trait as the best predictor was in line with the personality theory as it is thought to resemble intellectual capacity and is notably related with general cognitive intelligence, which was found to correlate with leadership performance (Bass, 1997; Judge & Bono, 2000; McCrae & Costa, 1987; Ployhart, Lim, & Chan, 2001; Strang & Kuhnert, 2009).

Hypotheses 2 and 3 hypothesized that emotional intelligence is a significant predictor of leadership. It also demonstrates evidence of incremental validity over the personality traits in predicting the leadership of future leaders. The results of the beta coefficient indicated that emotional intelligence was a significant predictor to leadership. Meanwhile, results also revealed that emotional intelligence significantly predicted leadership by taking into account the potential influence of personality traits. Thus, hypotheses 2 and 3 were supported. This finding is in line with the theoretical foundation of leadership practices that describe leadership as an "emotion laden process" (George, 2000, p. 1046). Based on this theory, emotions are important for leadership and wise decision-making. Emotional intelligence is expected to influence leadership by enabling leaders to more effectively manage their own and the emotions of their supporters (George, 2000; Humphrey et al., 2008; Law et al., 2008).

## CONCLUSION

This study supported the notions that leadership effectiveness requires emotional intelligence and emotionally intelligent leaders are more likely to emerge as effective leaders (Kerr, Garvin, Heaton & Boyle,



2006; Rajah, Song & Arvey, 2011; Walter et al., 2011). Results showed that while controlling the potential influence of personality traits, emotional intelligence is still able to add significant incremental variance in predicting leadership. Since recent reports revealed that the Malaysian undergraduate students lack soft skills including leadership skills (Ridhwan, 2013), a module to enhance undergraduate students' emotional intelligence may be useful to improve their leadership competency. This effort is in line with Malaysia's Philosophy of Education Malaysia which clearly states that education in Malaysia aims to develop comprehensive human potential in producing human capital that has balanced physical, emotional, spiritual and intellectual development (Sufean, 1993). In addition to Malaysia's Philosophy of Education, Islam highly values Muslim leaders who are competent in leadership, skilful, and possess exemplary characters (Taher, 2007).

One of the limitations of this study is the data were collected at one Malaysian university and collected from ethnic Malay Muslim students only. Thus, the restriction of the sampling to a Muslim Malay university student population may invite some uncertainty in terms of the generalizability of the findings. The results need to be validated in other Muslim communities and different contexts. Second, this research used the composite score of emotional intelligence as a unit of analysis. Future research on the relationship between emotional intelligence and leadership should examine which dimensions of emotional intelligence (self-emotional appraisal, other's emotional appraisal, regulation of emotion and use of emotion to facilitate performance dimensions), which are highly related to leadership.

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