A Qualitative Exploration of a New Concept in Support of Good Educational Leadership – Emotional Intelligence*

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Abstract

There has been a shift in the conceptualization of leadership and needed leadership skills in education within today's society. Models that were previously used to aid in the development and understanding of leadership roles may not be appropriate given the current climate within education. However, new concepts based largely on research are emerging. This new conceptualization involves Emotional Intelligence (EI). Nelson and Low (2003) defined their theory of EI to include skill sets involving positive uses of interpersonal, intrapersonal, leadership, and self-management skills, while avoiding problem areas to include aggression, deference and change orientation. Additionally, EI skills may be associated with personal satisfaction, health, and achievement within career and academics (Nelson & Low, 2003). In other words, positive levels of EI skills and low levels of problem areas may correlate with professionally high achievers and vice versa for low or average achievers. Based on the works of Goleman (1998), Epstein (1998), Sternberg (1996), and Nelson and Low (2003), the concept of EI is now providing a useful and practical model for utilization within the education administration and leadership arena.

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1 Sumario en espanol

Ha habido un cambio en la conceptualización de liderazgo y habilidades necesitadas de liderazgo en la educación dentro de la sociedad de hoy. Los modelos que fueron utilizados anteriormente ayudar en el desarrollo y comprendiendo de papeles de liderazgo no puede ser apropiados dado el clima actual dentro de la educación. Sin embargo, nuevos conceptos se basaron en gran parte en investigación surgen. Esta nueva conceptualización implica la Inteligencia Emocional (EI). Nelson y Low (2003) definió su teoría de EI para incluir los conjuntos de habilidad que implican los usos positivos de interpersonal, intrapersonal, el liderazgo, y habilidades de autogestión, al evitar asuntos problemáticos incluir agresión, orientación de deferencia y cambio. Adicionalmente, habilidades de EI pueden ser asociadas con satisfacción personal, con la salud, y con el logro dentro de carrera y académicos (Nelson y Low, 2003). Es decir, positivo nivela de habilidades de EI y niveles bajos de asuntos problemáticos puede tener correlación con competidores profesionalmente altos y viceversa para punto más bajo o competidores medios. Basado en los trabajos de Goleman (1998), Epstein (1998), Sternberg (1996), y Nelson y Low (2003), el concepto de EI ahora proporciona un modelo útil y práctico para la utilización dentro de la administración de la educación y arena de liderazgo.

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2 Introduction

The belief that Intellectual Intelligence (IQ) has been attributed to a large amount of success in leadership has been challenged by many (Goleman,1998; Kincheloe, J., Steinburg, S., & Gresson, A., 1996). Though the assumption holds that IQ is needed, it is not the primary factor in successful leadership. This qualitative study will focus on ten factors (Assertion, Comfort, Empathy, Decision Making, Leadership, Drive Strength, Time Management, Commitment Ethics, Self-Esteem, and Stress Management) to see if a pattern may exist to support the correlation of high EI skill-sets with high achieving leadership roles. Patti and Tobin (2003) in their book *Smart School Leaders* stated that leaders must lead and develop socially and emotionally intelligent learning-focused schools. The focus of this research paper takes that rationale to a study of these skills as they relate to assessment, training, and development of leadership skills in the school environment; specifically it will look at the question from a qualitative standpoint whether the two groups selected scored differently when assessed with an instrument for emotional intelligence. The research that has been the foundation of information for this article has been undertaken with Graduate Education Administration students, active public school principals, and private industry CEO/CFO's.

High achievers for the scope of this paper will be defined as participants in the study who were currently engaged professionally in roles of leadership and their respective organizations were performing at a higher than average level. For example, one of the profiles represents a principal who took over an underachieving campus. Within two years and since that time period, the campus has been exemplary or the highest rating a school can achieve in Texas based on test scores of students. Average achievers are participants that are engaged in professional roles that do not include leadership or supervision of personnel, and when compared to other colleagues or peers these individuals are performing at about average levels.

3 Methodology

A study funded by a University Research Grant was conducted to ascertain whether scores obtained from the Emotional Skills Assessment Profile (ESAP) would differ for the two groups. Emotional Intelligence Skills as assessed by the ESAP and success in leadership roles was explored. The study consisted of selecting eight participants. Four of the participants were selected based on the fact they held leadership roles, and the remaining four were selected based on the fact they held non-leadership roles. Each participant and their respective role will be discussed in this paper.

4 Instrumentation

The ESAP is an instrument designed to provide a profile of emotional intelligence skills. The instrument developed by Nelson & Low (2003) has a scale score for each skilled area of Emotional Intelligence, and scores in each area are given upon completion of the online assessment. The skilled areas assessed are as follows: Assertion, Comfort, Empathy, Decision Making, Leadership, Drive Strength, Time Management, Commitment Ethic, Self Esteem, and Stress Management. Three additional skills that are considered negative scales are assessed and include Aggression, Deference, and Change Orientation (Nelson & Low, 2003). A brief explanation of each of the skill areas is provided.

4.1 Assertion

Assertion is one's ability to communicate in a directly open style that conveys both cognitive and emotional messages. Assertive people respect the sender of the message as well as the receiver of the message while constructively dealing with strong emotions like grief, fear, and anger.

4.2 Comfort

Comfort deals with the ability to read and impact others with verbal and non-verbal messages in a positive way. The ability to develop trust and rapport is an integral part of this skill. Comfort enables a person to be relaxed self-confident and be ones' self.

4.3 Empathy

Another common construct to most EI researchers is the ability to communicate to others their value and importance. Empathy is the facility to demonstrate care for others through congruent verbal and nonverbal actions. Empathy is the communication to another that his/her thoughts, feelings, and ideas matter. Empathy is closely associated to effective listening skills and conveying to another that he/she is understood.

4.4 Decision Making

Decision making is the ability to create, conceptually develop, and implement plans for successful problem solving. The ability to understand a systematic approach to organizations and the integration of their components is another facet of this skill.

4.5 Leadership

For the purpose of this skill area leadership can be defined as the ability to persuade and develop the abilities of others. Leadership is associated with the ability to have others follow a vision and buy into organizational goals.

4.6 Drive Strength

Drive Strength is one's ability to accomplish goals and activities resulting in self-fulfillment and attainment of purpose. This skill includes the understanding and motivation behind the principles of setting goals, objectives, and activities. Drive Strength is incorporated easily into the school environment through the establishment of academic goals and the specific objectives necessary to earn a diploma or degree.

4.7 Time Management

Time Management is the ability to focus and organize available time appropriately. Pro-activity instead of reactivity is an appropriate understanding of this concept. Time Management is significantly related to

student success (Vela, 2003). Time, being a man-made, abstract concept, is difficult for many to manage. The ability to break up fixed time periods like semesters or fiscal periods into smaller productive time schedules like daily, weekly, or monthly calendars is key in using time effectively.

4.8 Commitment Ethic

Commitment Ethic is one's aptitude to finish needed tasks, complete assignments, and accomplish one's projects. Commitment Ethic is connected to self direction, endurance, and self-initiated direction. Commitment Ethic is described as a personal feeling of satisfaction upon the completion of a task, job, or assignment.

4.9 Self Esteem

Self-esteem is the ability to view one's self as positive, competent, and successful. Self-esteem is closely associated with liking one's self and being able to accept their limits and faults.

4.10 Stress Management

Stress Management is the ability to control and deal effectively with fear or anxiety in relation to others and to situations. Stress Management involves developing an understanding of thoughts, actions, and emotions in fearful or stress producing situations and continuing to communicate effectively with others. Depression is closely associated with anxiety and is managed by an understanding that helplessness and hopelessness are a belief that situations are out of one's control (Buchanan, Gardenswartz, & Seligman, 1999).

5 Problems Areas

5.1 Aggression

Aggression is the potential problem area that negatively affects relationships. Aggression involves the anger emotion and the communication style may discredit or inhibit the receivers of a particular message.

5.2 Deference

Deference results in ineffective communications that negatively affect relationships. This skill involves communications that are ambiguous, weak, and misdirected. Deference is often involved with poor active listening skills, and lacks empathy.

5.3 Change Orientation

Change orientation is the degree to which an individual is or is not satisfied with current situations and the magnitude of change necessary or desired to develop personal and professional effectiveness. Change Orientation should be understood and converted to the positive changes of emotional skills and is related to Stress Management.

6 Design

The design of this study is a qualitative study with two groups chosen using a convenience sampling procedure to represent groups known to the researcher as professionally high achieving individuals and professionally average achieving individuals within educational and leadership positions. A description of each individual and their professional achievements will follow, as well as their specific profiles.

6.1 Participants

The composition of the first group selected to be professionally high achieving is labeled as I through IV and consisted of:

I. Elementary Principal – The principal took over a low achieving elementary campus in a predominantly Hispanic South Texas district. After two years as campus administrator, the school achieved Exemplary status and has continued at this level for the last three years. This participant's educational background included a Masters Degree in School Administration.
II. CEO – This participant was CEO of a large multi-million dollar retail food chain organization at the time of the study. After working a number of years within the areas of finance and technology, this participant was promoted to CEO. This participant's educational background included a Masters Degree in Business Administration.
III. CFO- This participant was CFO of a large for-profit hospital at the time of the study. This participant was responsible for patient billing of private and government charges in addition to investing profits and reporting to the hospital board. This participant's educational background included a Masters Degree in Accounting.
IV. Associate Professor – This participant was a Professor of Education at the time of the study. The professor was successful in scholarship and outstanding in instruction, and enjoyed previous success in public school administration. This participant's educational background consisted of a PhD in Educational Administration.

The composition of the second group selected to be average in professional achievement and labeled as V through VIII consisted of:

V. Elementary Principal – This participant took over a low achieving elementary campus in a predominantly Hispanic South Texas district. After three years as campus administrator under this participants' direction, the school still was ranked as a low performing campus. This participant's educational background included a Masters Degree in School Administration.
VI. Teacher – This participant was a teacher and graduate student in Educational Administration at the time of this study and had no experience in leadership roles. This participant's educational background included a Bachelors Degree in Elementary Education.
VII. Administrator in Higher Education – This participant worked in higher education at a campus under a larger parent organization at the time of this study. This participant held the position as administrator for approximately ten years. This participant's educational background included coursework almost completed toward a Bachelors Degree in Leadership.
VIII. Counselor – This participant was a counselor in a career college at a satellite campus for three years at the time of this study. This participant's educational background included a Masters Degree in Educational Counseling.

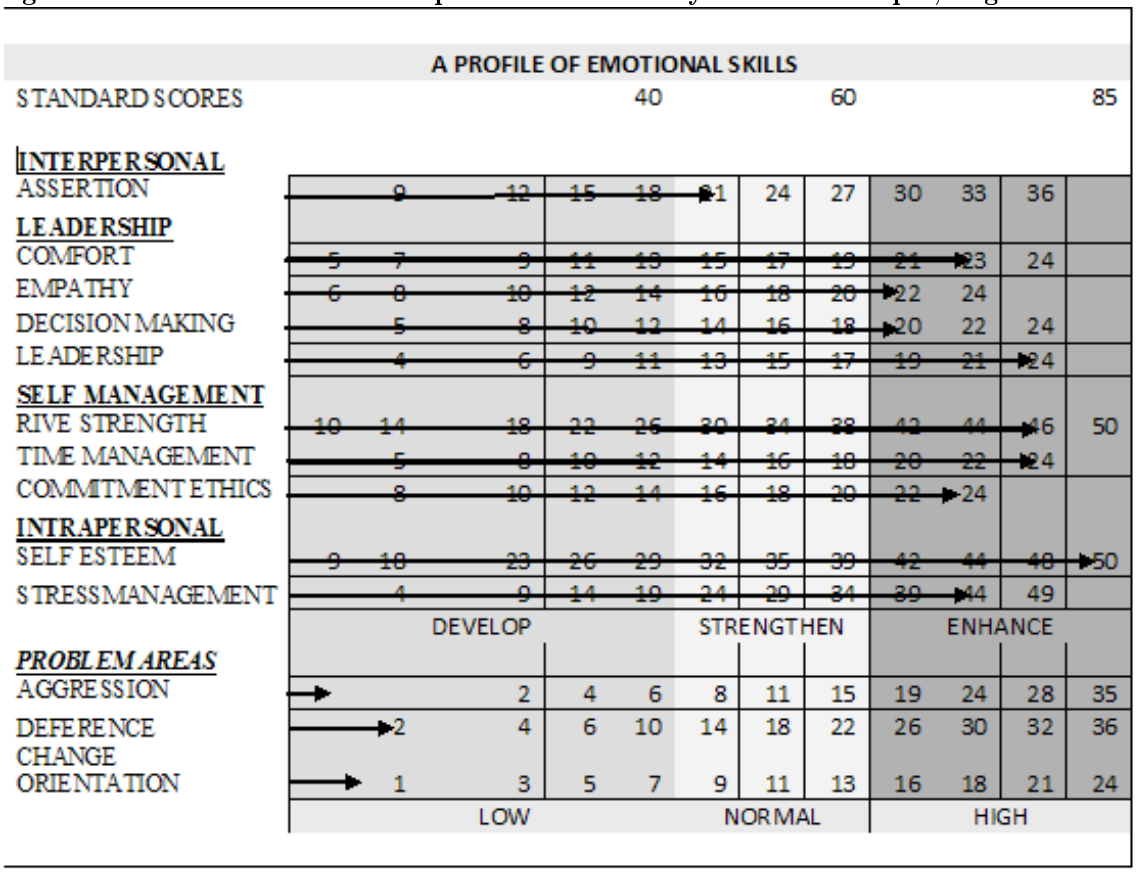
7 Procedure

Eight participants were chosen in a convenience sample model in regards to their achievements professionally within their careers in education and leadership. Individuals who had established a record of success within their careers were classified as high achievers while individuals who had not accomplished high levels of success were classified as average achievers. Once chosen and previously classified in achievement level by the researcher, each participant was asked to take an online assessment of the ESAP by giving each a secure web link to enter for testing via the internet. Upon completion of the assessment, participants received a copy of their ESAP EI profile with scores and additionally these scale scores were electronically transmitted for interpretation to the researcher. The researcher analyzed all EI skills set scores to determine if a trend seemed to emerge between the two groups of participants.

8 Results

The researcher analyzed each profile to determine if the levels of positive EI and problem area skills showed a pattern between profiles of high achieving and average achieving individuals. Figure 1 shows the ESAP scores of Participant I.

Figure 1. **ESAP scores of Participant I – Elementary School Principal, High Achieving**

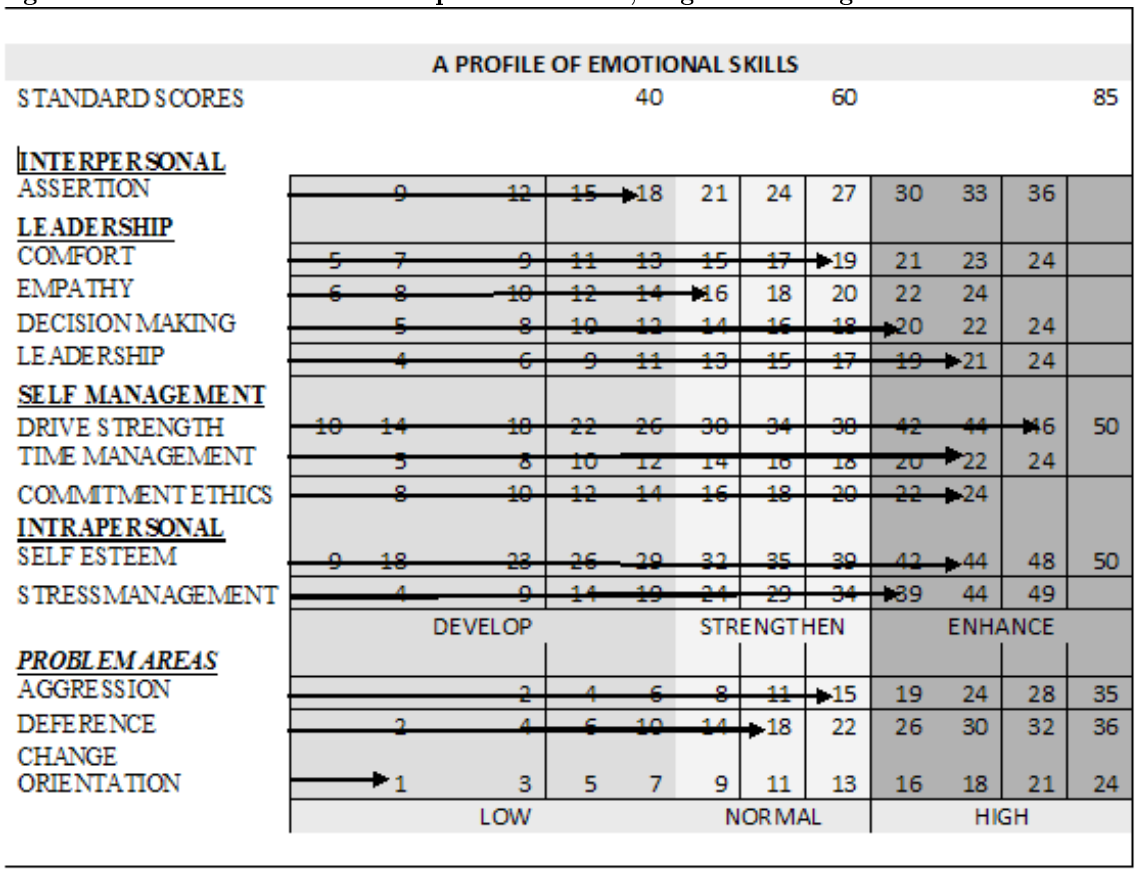


[2]

Participant 1 was considered a professionally high achieving individual who took an underperforming school and raised it to exemplary status. As shown in Figure 1, nine of the ten skills were considered high and positively correlated with good comfort, empathy, decision making, leadership, drive strength, time management, commitment ethic, self esteem and stress management. Assertion was the only skill that needed some strengthening for this individual. Additionally, Figure 1 shows all three problem areas were in the low range for this participant. The ESAP profile shown in Figure 1 seems to fit a pattern of good EI skills and high achievement.

[2] http://cnx.org/content/m37385/latest/Table1.PNG/image

Figure 2. **ESAP scores of Participant II – CEO, High Achieving**

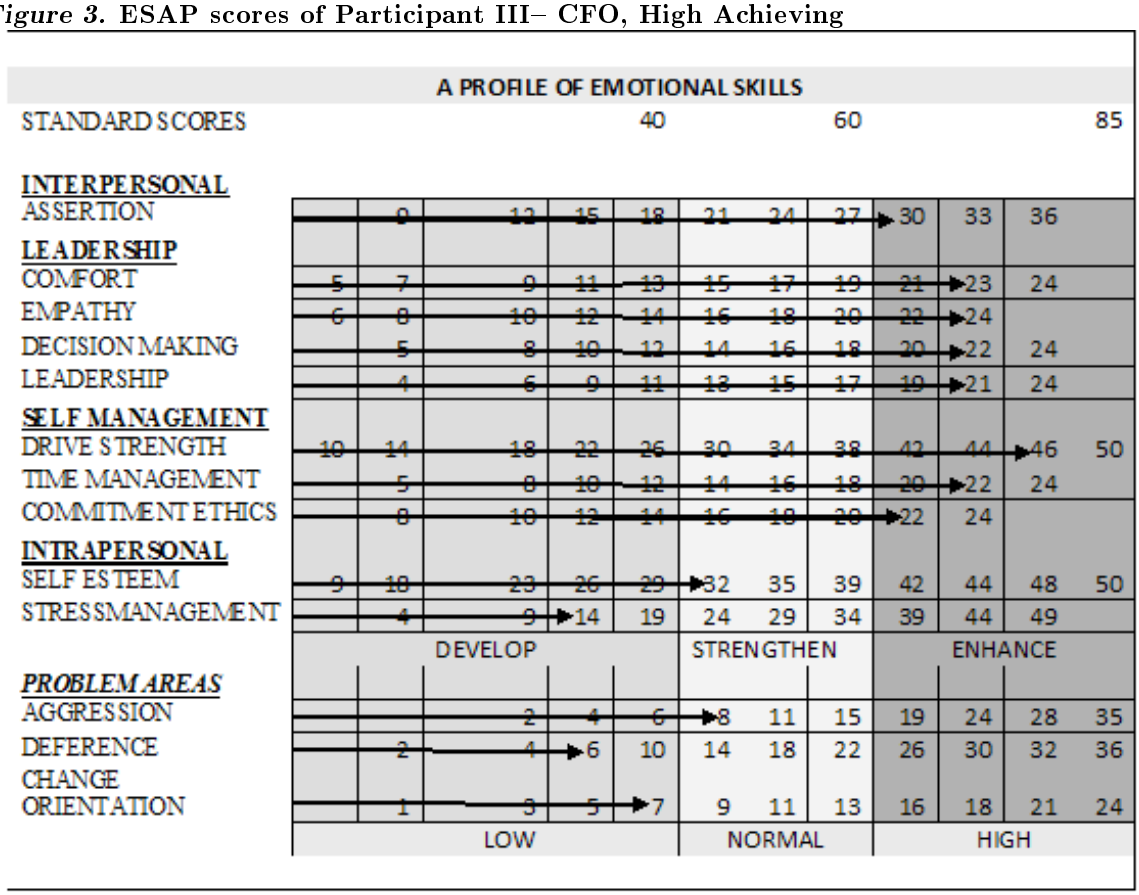


[3]

Participant 2 was considered a professionally high achieving individual who ran a multi-million dollar retail food chain successfully. As shown in Figure 2, seven of the ten skills were considered high and positively correlated with good decision making, leadership, drive strength, time management, commitment ethic, self esteem and stress management. The skills of assertion, comfort and empathy fell in the score range signifying development and strengthening. The researcher hypothesized that the skill of assertion came in the lowest likely due to the fact that an executive at that high level does not need to be assertive to get tasks completed – they simply tell subordinates what task to complete and that task gets done. Additionally, Figure 2 shows one of the three problem areas was in the low range for this participant and two were in the normal range. The ESAP profile shown in Figure 2 seems to fit a pattern of good EI skills and high achievement.

[3] http://cnx.org/content/m37385/latest/figure2.PNG/image

Figure 3. **ESAP scores of Participant III– CFO, High Achieving**

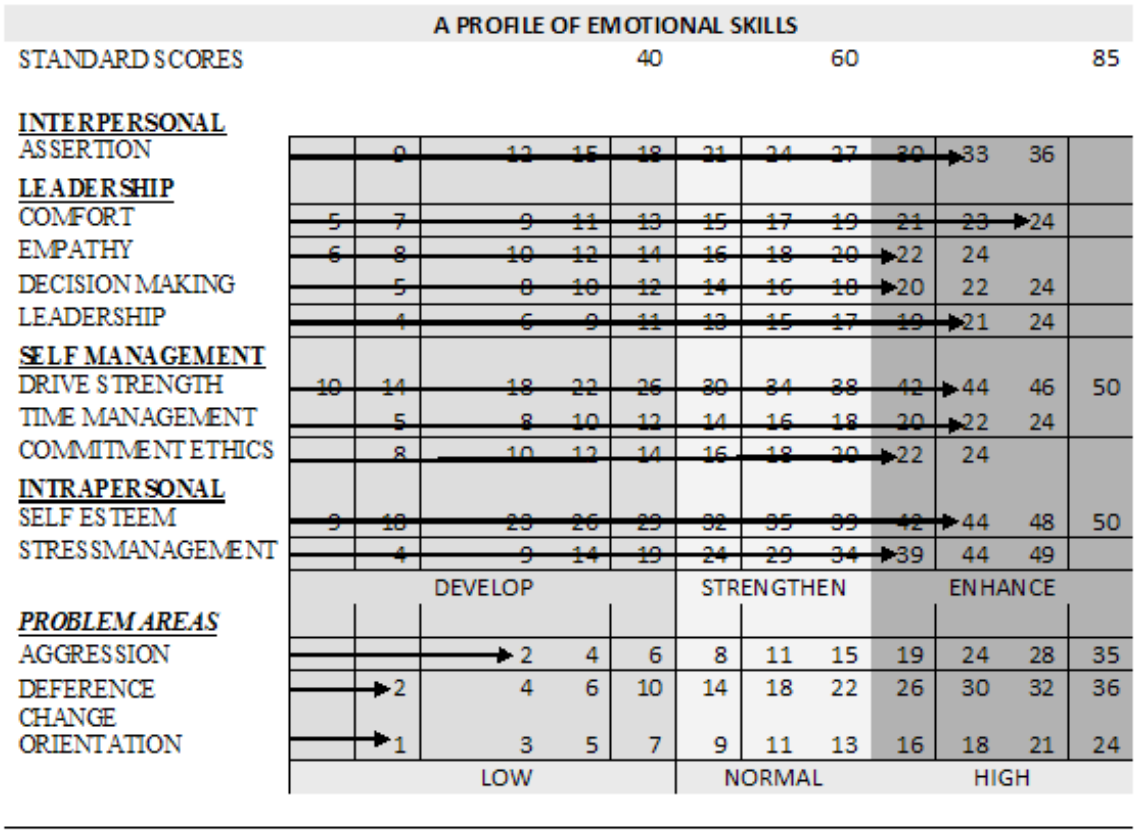


[4]

Participant 3 was considered a professionally high achieving individual who successfully ran the financial branch of a large for-profit hospital. As shown in Figure 3, nine of the ten skills were considered high and positively correlated with good assertion, comfort, empathy, decision making, leadership, drive strength, time management, and commitment ethic. The skills of self esteem and stress management came in at strengthen and develop respectively. Additionally, Figure 3 shows two of the three problem areas were in the low range for this participant and one was in the normal range. The ESAP profile shown in Figure 3 seems to fit a pattern of good EI skills and high achievement.

[4] http://cnx.org/content/m37385/latest/figure3.PNG/image

Figure 4. **ESAP scores of Participant IV – Associate Professor, High Achieving**

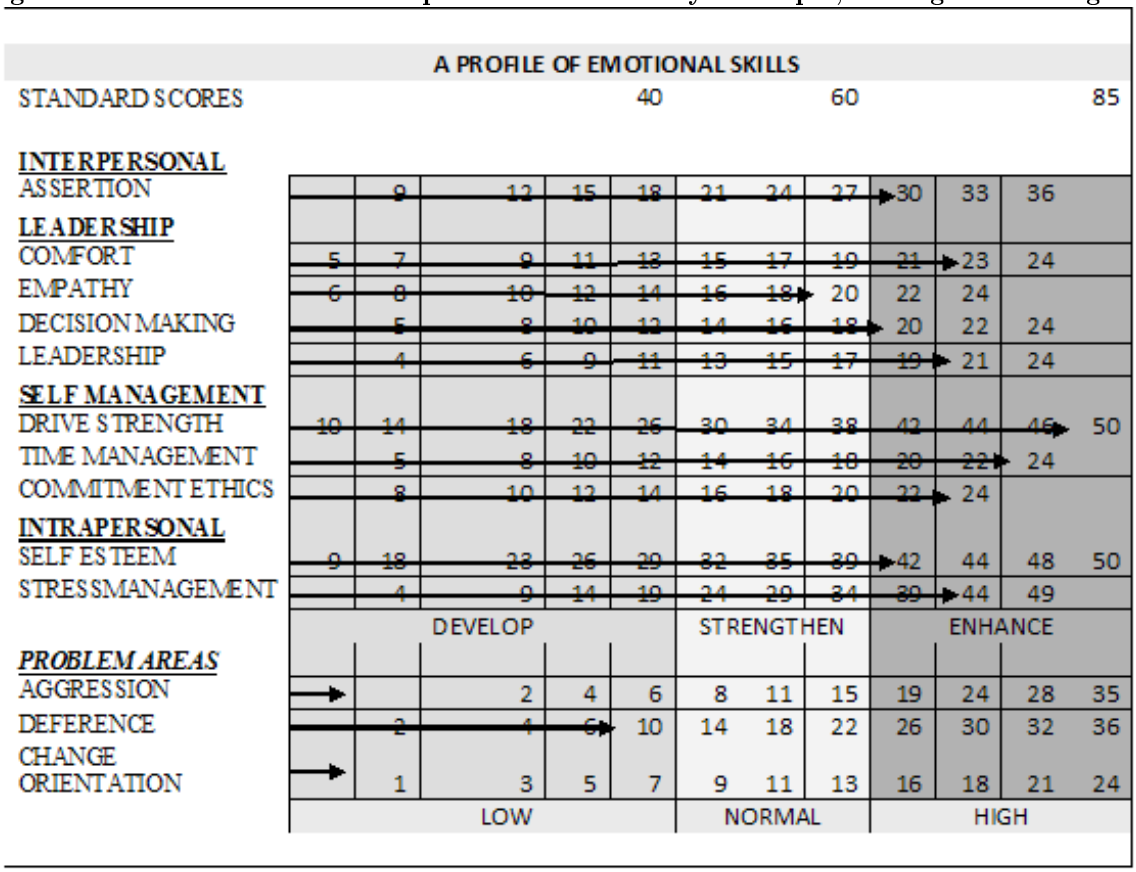


[5]

Participant 4 was considered a professionally high achieving individual who enjoyed success as a published and high-rated associate professor. As shown in Figure 4, all ten of the skills were considered high and positively correlated with good assertion, comfort, empathy, decision making, leadership, drive strength, time management, commitment ethic and self esteem. Additionally, Figure 4 shows all three of the problem areas were in the low range for this participant. The ESAP profile shown in Figure 4 seems to fit a pattern of good EI skills and high achievement.

[5] http://cnx.org/content/m37385/latest/figure4.PNG/image

Figure 5. **ESAP scores of Participant V – Elementary Principal, Average Achieving**

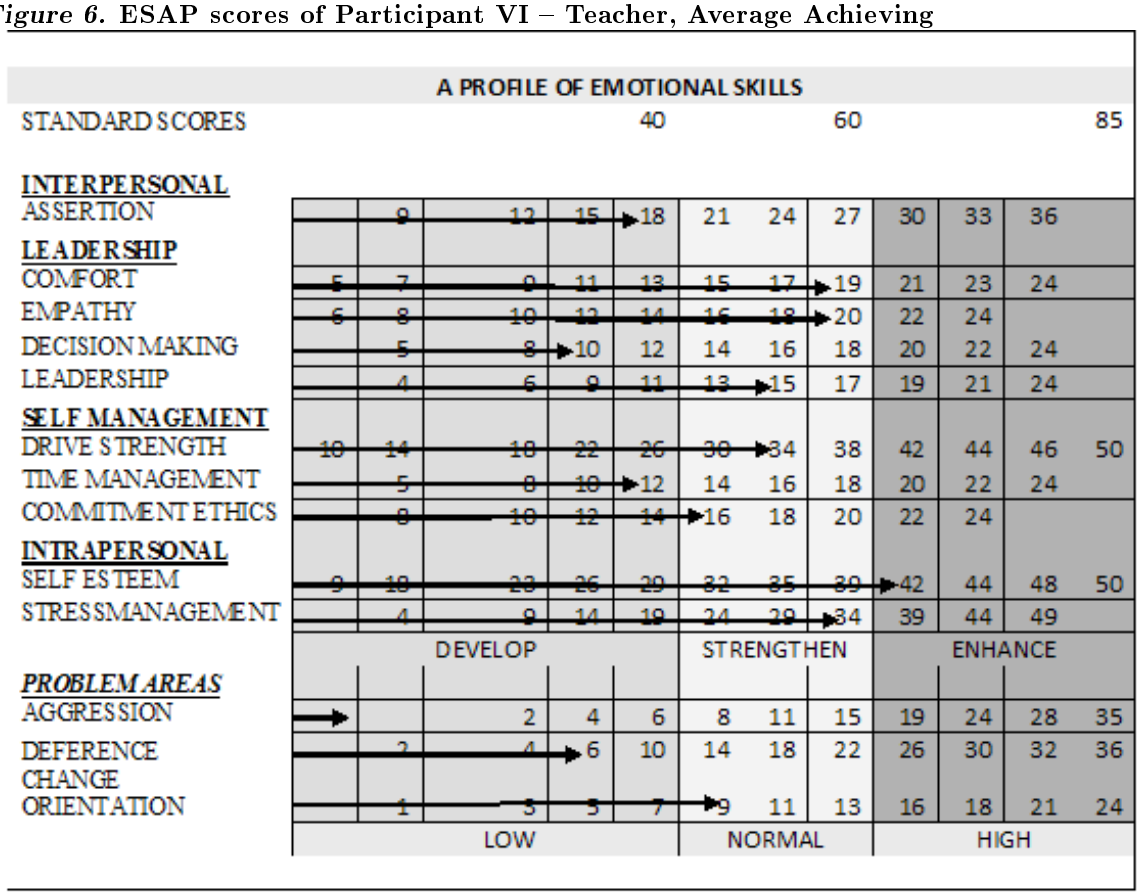


[6]

Participant 5 was considered a professionally average achieving individual who ran a low performing elementary school and after three years failed to increase the performance level of the school. As shown in Figure 5, all ten of the skills were considered high and positively correlated with good assertion, comfort, empathy, decision making, leadership, drive strength, time management, commitment ethic and self esteem. Additionally, Figure 5 shows all three of the problem areas were in the low range for this participant The ESAP profile shown in Figure 5 does not seem to fit a pattern of average EI skills and average achievement. This participant held high EI scores and low problem area scores, yet still achieved average accomplishments professionally.

[6] http://cnx.org/content/m37385/latest/figure5.PNG/image

Figure 6. **ESAP scores of Participant VI – Teacher, Average Achieving**



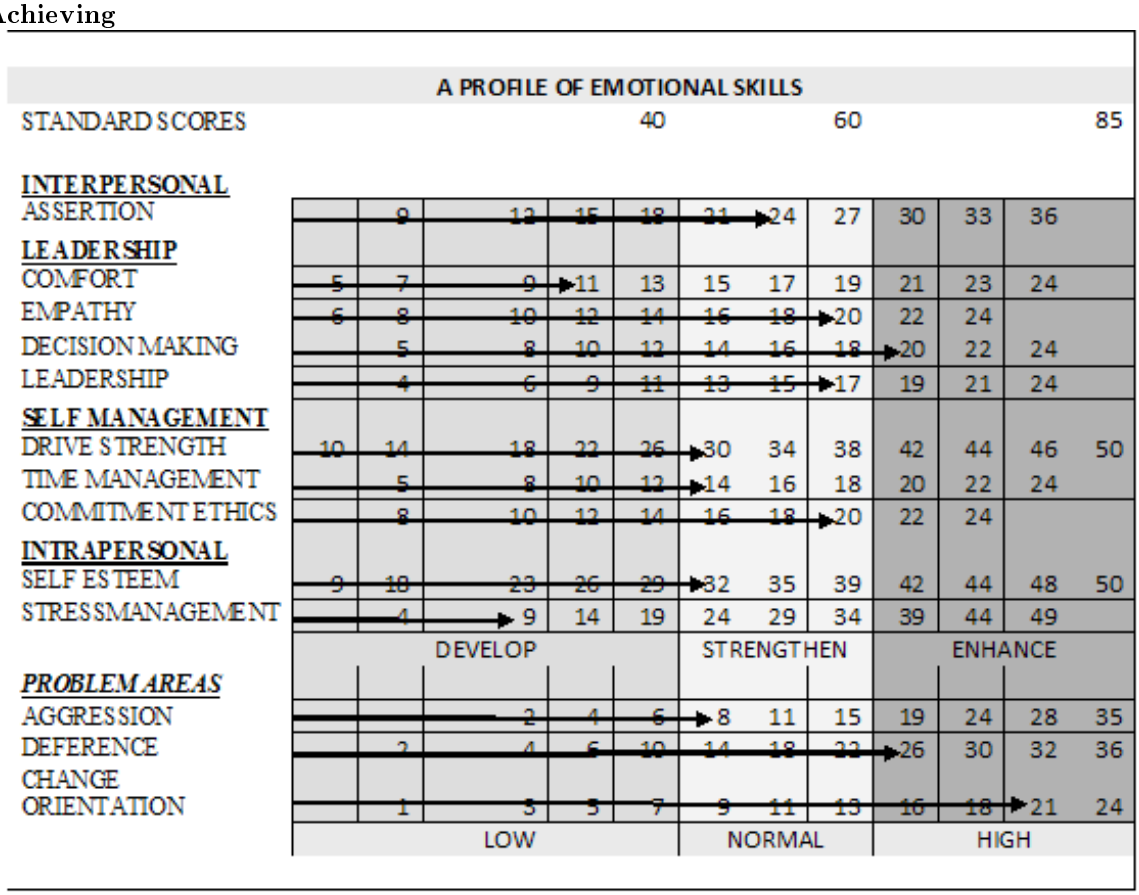
[7]

Participant 6 was considered a professionally average achieving individual who was a teacher who had not previously held any roles of leadership. As shown in Figure 6, six the skills were considered to need strengthening in regards to comfort, empathy, leadership, drive strength, commitment ethic and stress management. Assertion and time management were within the develop range while self esteem sits in the high range of enhancement. Two of the problem areas are in the low range for this participant and one problem area is in the normal range. The ESAP profile shown in Figure 6 seems to fit a pattern of average EI skills and average achievement.

Figure 7. **ESAP scores of Participant VII – Administrator in Higher Education, Average**

[7] http://cnx.org/content/m37385/latest/figure6.PNG/image

Achieving

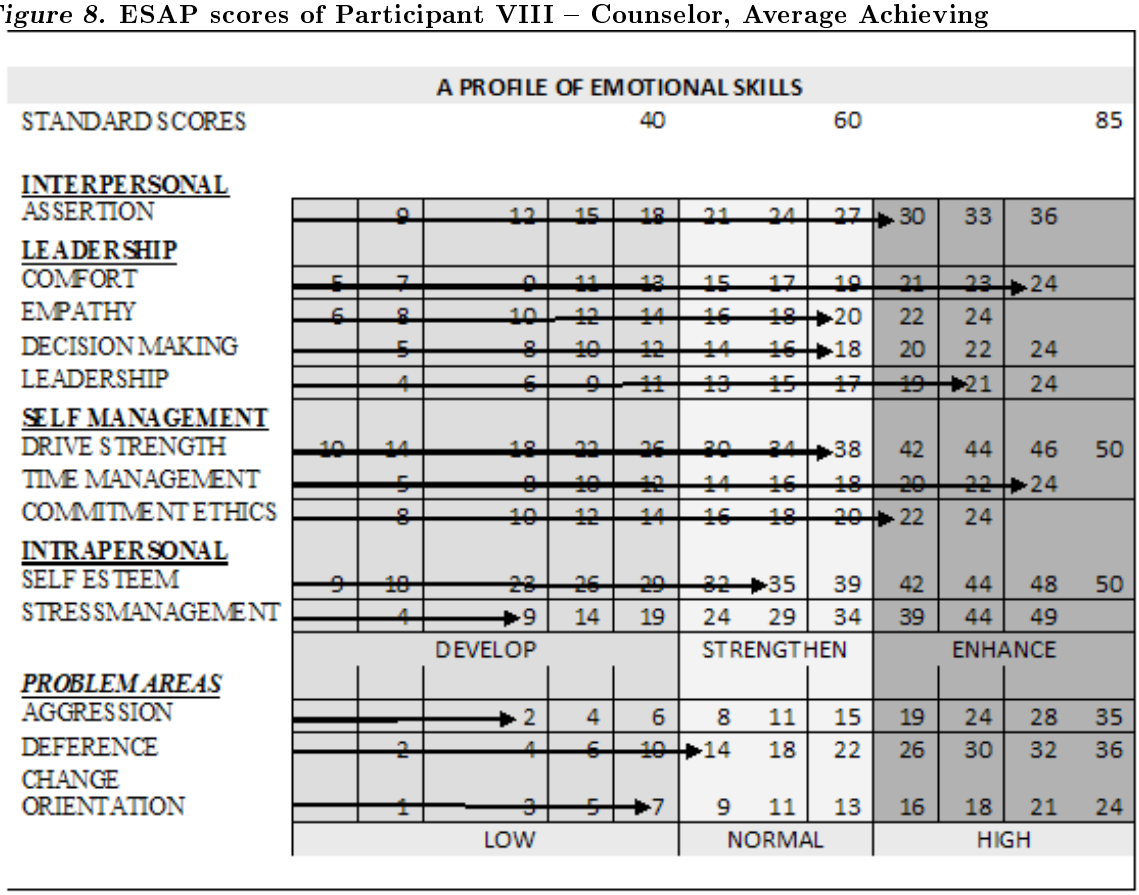


[8]

Participant 7 was considered a professionally average achieving individual who was an administrator at a satellite campus of a larger educational organization. As shown in Figure 7, seven of the ten skills were considered to need strengthening in regards to assertion, empathy, leadership, drive strength, time management, commitment ethic and self esteem. Comfort and stress management were within the develop range while decision making was the only skill in the high enhancement score range. One of the problem areas was in the high range for this participant and two problem area were in the normal range. The ESAP profile shown in Figure 7 seems to fit a pattern of average EI skills and average achievement.

[8] http://cnx.org/content/m37385/latest/figure7.PNG/image

Figure 8. **ESAP scores of Participant VIII – Counselor, Average Achieving**



[9]

Participant 8 was considered a professionally average achieving individual who was counselor at a satellite campus of a larger educational institution who had not held high leadership roles. As shown in Figure 8, five of the ten skills were considered to be high and only needed enhancement in regards to assertion, comfort, leadership, time management, and commitment ethic. Empathy, decision making, drive strength and self esteem fell within the range indicating a need for strengthening while stress management fell within the develop range at a low score. Additionally, two of the problem areas were in the low range for this participant and one problem area was in the normal range. The ESAP profile shown in Figure 8 does not seem to fit a pattern of average EI skills and average achievement. This participant held overall high EI scores and low problem area scores, yet still achieved average accomplishments professionally.

9 Discussion

The following is a summary of the profiles by groups. On the high achieving group, Participant I had one average (Strengthen) and nine high (Enhance) positive EI skill sets designated by the ESAP; Participant II had one low (Develop), two average (Strengthen) and six high (Enhance) positive EI skill sets designated by the ESAP; Participant III had one low (Develop), one average (Strengthen) and eight high (Enhance) positive EI skill sets designated by the ESAP; and Participant IV had ten high (Enhance) positive EI skill sets designated by the ESAP. On the low achieving group, Participant V had one average (Strengthen) and nine high (Enhance) positive EI skill sets designated by the ESAP; Participant VI had three low (Develop), six

[9] http://cnx.org/content/m37385/latest/figure8.PNG/image

average (Strengthen) and one high (Enhance) positive EI skill sets designated by the ESAP Participant VII had two low (Develop), seven medium (Strengthen) and one high (Enhance) positive EI skill sets designated by the ESAP; Participant VIII had one low (Develop), four medium (Strengthen) and five high (Enhance) positive EI skill sets designated by the ESAP.

The researcher compared the scores on the ESAP and found that overall a trend existed for scores in the standard skill sets needed for success and the success achieved professionally. The professionally high achieving group seemed to fit a pattern that indicated they would have high scores on the standard skill sets of EI, while the professionally average achieving group had two participants that fit a pattern of lower EI scores. Two of the participants in the average achieving group had higher than expected EI scores on the ESAP. Participant V had good overall EI scores, yet did not perform above average in the career setting. A plausible explanation for this could be that leadership and changes requires a change of culture. One explanation could be that though there was a change in leadership, the state standardized test scores did not yet reflect a positive change within the school. For participant VIII, the participant showed overall high EI scores, yet held an average-achieving position. This individual was selected based on the fact that they held a non-leadership professional role as a counselor. A plausible explanation for this could be that the skills of good EI are needed for counseling professionals, who may not always be in leadership positions. This study provides support for the concept that there is a relationship between professionals in high achieving positions and high scores on the ESAP

Results from this study were disseminated at a presentation within an annual conference for Emotional Intelligence, (2009 Institute for Emotional Intelligence. Houston, Texas). Attendees at the presentation of *Potter, G (2009), Educational Leadership: A longitudinal Correlational Study of Emotional Intelligence Skills and Success Factors of Graduate Education Administration Students* were shown results of this study and asked to group the profiles of the eight participants into categories of high or low achievers. The attendees were very accurate in identifying the high achievers the low achievers based on the scores provided by the ESAP.

10 Summary and Suggestion for Further Research

A study was conducted to explore the potential of Emotional Intelligence to be used as a model for educational leadership assessment and training. Indications are that the profiles for the ESAP assessment differ between the professionally high achievement group and the professionally average achieving group. An informal presentation at a conference of Emotional Intelligence indicated a consensus among attendees in distinguishing the two groups. Based on this study, further investigation seems to be warranted with perhaps a larger study utilizing a longitudinal research design. This and subsequent studies could provide additional useful information in developing a new conceptual model for assessment and training in Educational Administration.

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