# THE SOCIOEMOTIONALLY INTELLIGENT SELF-LEADER: EXAMINING RELATIONS BETWEEN SELF-LEADERSHIP AND SOCIOEMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

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For the first time, the associations among the relatively new construct of self-leadership (SL; Neck & Houghton, 2006) and socioemotional intelligence (SEI; Riggio & Reichard, 2008) are examined. One hundred and sixty-eight participants gave self-reports on SL and SEI. Generally, SL and subfacets correlated positively with SEI and subfacets, however, strong associations were found for social sensitivity and emotional expressivity, but no associations were found for emotional control. Findings are discussed in light of SL regulation strategies concerning cognition, emotion, and behavior.

*Keywords:* self-leadership, socioemotional intelligence, social intelligence, emotional intelligence.

People with high self-leadership (SL) competencies (managing one's own thoughts and behaviors in order to intrinsically pursue goals effectively and be productive) and those with high emotional intelligence (EI; perceiving, interpreting, and managing one's emotional states) can be expected to have self-regulation abilities (Riggio & Reichard, 2008). According to Neck and Manz (2007), EI primarily relates to emotion regulation, and SL primarily to self-regulation of thought processes and behaviors (e.g., Boss & Sims, 2008;

D'Intino, Goldsby, Houghton, & Neck, 2007). D'Intino et al. postulate that people scoring high on EI should also be competent self-leaders. Thus, EI and SL may complement each other: a person high in EI can also utilize higher levels of SL and a person with high levels of SL should also be more emotionally intelligent.

SL consists of three primary strategy dimensions: (1) behavior-focused strategies (self-goal-setting, self-reward, self-punishment, self-observation, self-cueing), (2) natural reward strategies (e.g., intrinsic motivation), and (3) constructive thought patterns (visualizing successful performance, self-talk, evaluating beliefs and assumptions). These domains may be associated with different components of socioemotional intelligence (SEI). According to D'Intino et al. (2007), behavior-focused skills should be associated with EI; and according to Depape, Hakim-Larson, Voelker, Page, and Jackson (2006), self-talk predicts EI (cf. Lane, Thelwell, Lowther, & Devonport, 2009). Boss and Sims (2008) also point out an association between SL and emotion regulation, especially the behavior-focused strategy of self-observation (a subfacet), and the dimension of constructive thought patterns have a close link to emotion regulation.

Emotion regulation is a key concept in EI. According to Mikolajczak, Nelis, Hansenne, and Quoidbach (2008), highly emotionally intelligent individuals use adaptive strategies in order to regulate negative emotions and maintain positive ones. Negative emotions are dampened, so that more positive emotions can be experienced. Closely associated with emotion regulation is self-regulation (Carver & Scheier, 1998), which is a basic component of SL. According to Neck and Houghton (2006), the strategy domain of constructive thought patterns has a positive influence on self-regulation processes.

The aim in the present study was to examine the associations between SL and SEI. Further, associations among emotion regulation, specifically emotional control, as well as cognitive self-regulation of thought processes and behavior, were examined. In accordance with the literature, positive relationships between SL and SEI, with their respective subfacets, were hypothesized.

## METHOD

### PARTICIPANTS

One hundred and sixty-eight students (mostly in their first or second year of psychology) interacted for 7 minutes in randomly generated dyads (they completed the NASA game) and then provided information on several dimensions (e.g., Big Five, Dark Triad); only self-reports of SL and SEI were analyzed. There were 123 females (73.20%) and 45 males (26.80%) in the sample. Participants had a mean age of 22.49 years ($M = 22$ years; $SD = 2.79$ years; range: 19-34 years). Students obtained credit points in exchange for participating.

**MEASURES**

*Self-leadership* was measured with the Revised Self-Leadership Questionnaire (RSLQ; Andreßen & Konradt, 2007), which was based on Houghton and Neck's (2002) scale. It has 27 items to be answered on 5-point Likert scales (from 1 = *totally disagree* to 5 = *totally agree*), and means were computed for all scales.

*Socioemotional intelligence* was measured with Riggio and Carney's (2003) Social Skills Inventory (SSI), consisting of 90 items to be answered on 5-point Likert scales (from 1 = *not at all like me* to 5 = *exactly like me*). Sum scores were computed. Different scales can be assessed with the SSI: (a) socioemotional intelligence (SEI) as a global scale consisting of all 90 items; (b) social intelligence (SI) consisting of all items relating to the social/verbal domain (i.e., SE + SS + SC), social expressivity (SE; e.g., "When telling a story, I usually use a lot of gestures to help get the point across"), social sensitivity (SS; e.g., "I am generally concerned about the impression I am making on others"), social control (SC; e.g., "I am not very good at mixing at parties"); (c) emotional intelligence (EI) consisting of all items relating to the emotional/nonverbal domain (i.e., EE + ES + EC), emotional expressivity (EE; e.g., "I have been told that I have expressive eyes"), emotional sensitivity (ES; e.g., "I am often told that I am a sensitive, understanding person"), emotional control (EC; e.g., "I am very good at maintaining a calm exterior even if I am upset"); (d) expressivity (E), sensitivity (S), and control (C) incorporating social and emotional facets for each.

**STATISTICAL ANALYSIS**

Bivariate zero-order Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to investigate the interrelationships among SL and SEI, along with their respective subfacets.[1]

## RESULTS

As can be seen in Table 1, SL and subfacets showed a small to moderate positive association with SEI (10 out of 12 possible times; $r$s = .16 – .33, $p$s < .05), SI (9 out of 12 possible times; $r$s = .18 – .36, $p$s < .05), and EI (9 out of 12 possible times, $r$s = .16 – .24, $p$s < .05). Concerning subfacets of SEI, the most significantly positive correlations are found for the domain of expressivity (7 out of 12 possible times; $r$s = .22 – .29, $p$s < .05), and for the subfacets social expressivity (8 out of 12 possible times, $r$s = .19 – .31, $p$s < .05) and emotional sensitivity (8 out of 12 possible times, $r$s = .16 – .24, $p$s < .05).

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[1]     To conserve space, means, standard deviations, and internal consistencies (reliability coefficient: Cronbach's alpha) are not indicated in this article, but can be obtained upon request by email from the first author.

**TABLE 1**
BIVARIATE ZERO-ORDER PEARSON CORRELATIONS OF SELF-LEADERSHIP AND FACETS WITH SOCIOEMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

| | SL (g) | 1 | 1a | 1b | 1c | 1d | 1e | 2 | 3 | 3a | 3b | 3c |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Socioemotional intelligence | .33*** | .32*** | .27** | .20* | .07 | .32*** | .17 | .32*** | .21** | .22** | .11 | .16* |
| Expressivity | .27** | .28*** | .25** | .27** | -.08 | .27*** | .22** | .29*** | .13† | .17 | .04. | .10 |
| Sensitivity | .27** | .31*** | .12 | .18* | .34** | .22** | .13 | .14† | .14† | .11 | .10 | .11 |
| Control | .14 | .06 | .17* | -.04 | -.05 | .16* | -.01 | .21** | .18* | .16* | .11 | .14† |
| Emotional intelligence | .24** | .21** | .18* | .16* | .08 | .22** | .06 | .19* | .21** | .18* | .15† | .17* |
| Emotional expressivity | .19* | .22** | .12. | .31*** | -.08 | .20** | .15† | .20* | .08 | .11 | .02 | .05 |
| Emotional sensitivity | .24** | .21** | .11 | .12 | .17* | .16* | .10 | .20* | .20** | .13† | .16* | .19* |
| Emotional control | .04 | -.01 | .10 | -.10 | .10 | .05 | -.13† | -.02 | .12 | .09 | .10 | .08 |
| Social intelligence | .35*** | .36*** | .30*** | .22** | .08 | .35*** | .24** | .36*** | .18* | .21** | .07 | .14† |
| Social expressivity | .28*** | .28*** | .29*** | .19* | -.06 | .28*** | .25** | .31*** | .15 | .19* | .05 | .12 |
| Social sensitivity | .19* | .28*** | .08 | .16* | .36*** | .18* | .10 | .04 | .03 | .06 | .01 | -.00 |
| Social control | .18* | .11 | .18* | .05 | -.17* | .20** | .12 | .35*** | .17* | .16* | .08 | .15 |

*Notes:* SL (g) = global self-leadership, 1 = behavior-focused strategies, 1a = self-goal-setting, 1b = self-reward, 1c = self-punishment, 1d = self-observation, 1e = self-cueing, 2 = natural reward strategies, 3 = constructive thought patterns, 3a = visualizing successful performance, 3b = self-talk, 3c = evaluating beliefs and assumptions.

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, † $p < .10$

## DISCUSSION

In many instances SEI correlated significantly positively with SL and subfacets, while SI showed on average higher correlations than EI. Expressivity (especially social expressivity) showed the strongest associations with SL, particularly with behavior-focused strategies and natural reward strategies. According to Riggio and Reichard (2008), expressivity refers to the ability of expressing oneself verbally as well as nonverbally and thus positively influencing others. Emotional sensitivity, referring to the ability of recognizing and accurately interpreting verbal and nonverbal emotional displays, shows positive associations with all three SL strategy domains. Individuals high in SL should have socioemotional skills in order to pursue their needs and goals in their social environments. Thus, social sensitivity (i.e., being sensitive to others and gauging their positions) and emotional expressivity (i.e., conveying one's position) are necessary for self-leaders to be effective in what they are doing (at least in interpersonal contexts).

Interestingly, emotional control, referring to the ability of controlling and regulating one's own emotions, which was posited to be linked to SL via self-regulation (an integral concept of SL), showed no significant correlations with SL or its subfacets. This finding, however, is mirrored in Neck and Manz's (2007) description of how control and regulation of emotions are peripheral to SL strategies as SL refers to control and regulation of thoughts and behaviors (and would thus be rooted in a cognitive-behavioral domain and not in an affective-emotional one). SL is, thus, not conceptualized as modulating one's emotions. However, SL is associated with goal pursuit (Neck, Nouri, & Godwin, 2003), and this might make it necessary to regulate one's momentary needs and feelings.

The construct of SL should be investigated more closely in future studies, specifically, which components does it comprise and how are these (hierarchically) structured? In addition to self-ratings, peer ratings, and behavioral observations should be employed. Further, it should be examined how SL is related to emotion regulation and goal pursuit (both in short- and long-term periods) as SL might also comprise of a motivational component which might link it to emotions (e.g., delay of gratification). Cognitive patterns might be the regulation strategies for monitoring, controlling, and modulating motivations and emotions, and the "regulated mental processes" might be exhibited in productive, effective, goal-oriented, persevering behavioral patterns. Of course, SL needs also to be studied in social contexts as most situations in our daily lives are interpersonal in nature. Specifically, this brings up the question of whether SL refers rather to nonsocial, social, or both goal categories (and if there are different types of self-leaders contingent on their goals and regulation strategies), and whether these goals are differentially pursued – perhaps with more or fewer socioemotional skills.

## CONCLUSION

In this article the association between SL and SEI with their respective subfacets was examined for the first time and it was shown that there are largely positive interrelations. Specifically, social sensitivity and emotional expressivity seem to be important for self-leaders, whereas the importance of emotion regulation seems negligible. Self-leaders are effective in regulating their thought and behavior patterns which, as the findings indicate, might not necessarily be associated with emotional control. To pursue one's goals it is important to be expressive in, and sensitive and reactive to one's social environment (i.e., external orientation, interpersonal view) even though one's own emotions might not be the focus of regulation strategies (i.e., internal orientation, intrapersonal view). In short, self-leaders need to be socioemotionally intelligent in interpersonal situations in order to get ahead.

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