

INVESTING IN WHAT MATTERS: THE IMPACT OF EMOTIONAL AND SOCIAL COMPETENCY DEVELOPMENT AND EXECUTIVE COACHING ON LEADER OUTCOMES

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Emotional intelligence has been considered a hallmark of successful leaders for nearly three decades. During the same period, executive coaching emerged as a beneficial resource for leader development in organizations. The purpose of this pilot study is to investigate the impact of emotional and social competence (ESC) and executive coaching on leader job performance, personal vision, engagement, and career satisfaction. Eighty-five senior leaders in a North American financial services organization completed a development program, which included classroom learning, ESC assessment using a multirater (or 360-degree) feedback instrument, and executive coaching to encourage ESC development. Survey responses were collected and triangulated with job performance data and 360-degree feedback. Results indicated a relationship between ESC, coaching and desired leader outcomes. What does it mean? Findings suggested that emotional and social competence and executive coaching can have significant impact on leader performance and work engagement, and quality of a coaching relationship moderates the relationship between dimensions of leader ESC with work engagement and career satisfaction. Additional results indicated a direct connection between quality of the coaching relationship and personal vision, work engagement, and career satisfaction. The results of this pilot study have important implications for scholars and practitioners interested in emotional competence and executive coaching and organizations focused on developing leaders through coaching.

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What's It Mean? Implications for Consulting Psychology

This study highlights the relationship between emotional and social competence (ESC), executive coaching, and desired leader outcomes such as job performance, personal vision, work engagement and career satisfaction. Findings demonstrate that ESC and quality of the coaching relationship have important influence on leader performance, engagement and satisfaction. These results may be of interest to scholars examining leader development, leader effectiveness, emotional intelligence, and coaching in the workplace. Organizations focused on building a culture of emotional intelligence and coaching along with professional coaches may also find these results meaningful, raising awareness of coaching relationship quality as an essential ingredient in effective practice.

Keywords: leader development, executive coaching, emotional and social competence, emotional intelligence, leader outcomes

Organizations spend billions of dollars on training and development programs focused on equipping leaders with the knowledge and skills to increase their effectiveness and, in turn, organizational performance. Organizational investments in leadership development have increased an average of 14% in recent years, reaching \$15 billion in 2013 (Meinert, 2014). Bersin by Deloitte (2014) indicated that United States organizations with more mature leader development programs outspent their competitors, investing three times more on emerging leaders, two times more on executives, and 60% more on first-level leaders than the least mature organizations. Results of a recent meta-analysis on the effectiveness of leadership development programs suggest that, although more concrete business skills (e.g., transactional processes) may be easier to teach leaders, programs that emphasize development of more affective and relational competencies result in outcomes such as improved organizational return on investment (ROI) and increased employee perception of positive organizational support (Lacerenza, Reyes, Marlow, Joseph, & Salas, 2017). It is not surprising, then, that leader development programs featuring emotional intelligence (EI) and executive coaching as central components have become increasingly popular and have captured the interest of scholars and practitioners alike (Campbell Quick & Macik-Frey, 2004; Day, 2000; Wong & Law, 2002).

EI is the capacity for recognizing our own emotions and those of others, for motivating ourselves and others, and for regulating our emotions and building strong rapport in service of our relationships (Goleman, 1995, 1998). EI includes learned capabilities or competencies (Boyatzis, 2008; McEnrue & Groves, 2006;). Our study draws upon a behavioral approach to EI focused on emotional and social competencies (ESCs). Competence is defined as any measurable behavior of a person that differentiates a level of performance in a given job, role, organization, or culture (Boyatzis, 1982; Spencer & Spencer, 1993). Goleman (1995, 1998) and Boyatzis (2008) describe ESCs as the behaviors leaders demonstrate to recognize their own and others' emotions as well as the behaviors they demonstrate to effectively manage themselves and their relationships with others.

Empirical studies over the past 20 years indicate ESC positively influences a range of workplace outcomes including job performance (Côté & Miners, 2006; Dulewicz, Young, & Dulewicz, 2005; Hopkins & Bilimoria, 2008; Law, Wong, Huang, & Li, 2008; Rojell, Pettijohn, & Parker, 2006), general leadership performance (Boyatzis, Good, & Massa, 2012; Dulewicz et al., 2005), job satisfaction (Wong & Law, 2002; Wong, Law, & Wong, 2004), leadership effectiveness (Kerr, Garvin, Heaton, & Boyle, 2006; Palmer, Walls, Burgess, & Stough, 2001; Rosete & Ciarrochi, 2005; Walter, Cole, & Humphrey, 2011) and work attitudes (e.g., Miao, Humphrey, & Qian, 2016).

To help leaders develop ESC and other important leader behaviors, executive coaching has emerged as an increasingly popular resource. Executive coaching has been shown to address a multitude of issues including behavior change (Bennett & Bush, 2013; Wasylshyn, 2003), cognitive flexibility (Diedrich, 1996), skill enhancement (Witherspoon & White, 1996), and leader

effectiveness (Thach, 2002; Wasylyshyn, 2003). Studies indicate that a high-quality coaching relationship facilitates desired coaching outcomes (Baron & Morin, 2009; Bennett, 2006; Boyce, Jackson, & Neal, 2010). However, relatively few studies explore the relationship between ESC, the executive coaching relationship, and leader outcomes.

Our inquiry explores connections not adequately addressed in prior literature: the extent to which ESC is related to four leader outcomes (job performance, personal vision, work engagement, and career satisfaction) and the impact of an executive coaching relationship on these outcomes. In this paper, we begin by first defining each leader outcome. We then discuss a research model that proposes the theoretical relationship between, ESC, executive coaching, and the four outcomes. Next, we present our empirical study of these relationships. We conclude by discussing the results, limitations, and implications of our work for future research and practice.

Key Leader Outcomes

In prior leadership research, scholars have suggested different conceptualizations for what constitutes an effective leader, mostly focusing on what great leaders actually “do.” This has led to a plethora of terms and descriptions suggesting that effective leadership is multifaceted and not easily describable. Nevertheless, a central underpinning of leader behavior research is that leadership is an “emotion-laden process” (Humphrey, 2002, 2008; Walter et al., 2011). Humphrey (2002, 2008) proposed that an essential function of a leader is the effective management of employees’ feelings and that a leader’s ability to manage the emotional climate in the workplace can significantly impact performance. Leaders who positively and effectively manage their own emotions and those of others are often more in tune with followers and better equipped to build and sustain effective relationships (Goleman, 1998; Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002). Goleman et al. (2002) and Boyatzis (2009) advocate that this ESC is a key differentiator between successful performing leaders and those considered average.

Seeking to contribute to what we currently know about the importance of leader ESC, we predict a positive relationship between the ESC of leaders and key leader outcomes. In this study, we selected four outcomes previously associated with effective leader behavior. First, a traditional indicator of leader success and effectiveness in organizations is a track record of job performance (Lyness & Thompson, 2000). Levenson and colleagues (Levenson, Van der Stede, & Cohen, 2006) found evidence at a Fortune 500 company that leader competencies were tied directly to individual-level performance ratings. Aspects of leader competencies such as knowledge, problem-solving skills, and social judgment all account for leader-level job performance based on supervisor performance ratings (Connelly et al., 2000). Numerous studies validate the use of a superior’s rating of an individual as a legitimate indicator of success and performance (Judge, Cable, Boudreau, & Bretz, 1995; Lyness & Thompson, 2000).

Hypothesis 1a: Leader ESC positively relates to leader job performance.

Second, leader personal vision is conceptualized as a written expression of an individual’s ideal self or hopes and dreams for the future (Stam, Lord, Knippenberg, & Wisse, 2014). As opposed to being goal oriented, a personal vision is aspirational and takes a long-term versus short-term perspective (Stam et al., 2014). At its core, a personal vision includes discovery of an individual’s passion, purpose, values, identity and dreams, upon which the individual can visualize an ideal future and build the capacity to attain it (Boyatzis & Akrivou, 2006). For leaders, personal vision enables their effectiveness by fostering intention, commitment, and clarity in their decisions, behaviors, and relationships. Personal vision is also necessary for leaders who wish to achieve sustained, desired change in their own developmental efforts (Boyatzis, Rochford, & Taylor, 2015). For a leader to articulate a personal vision, they must be self-aware to know what they desire to become and why they care about it. In addition, they must have a degree of social awareness to understand the resulting implications of their aspirations and actions on others that surround them.

Hypothesis 1b: Leader ESC positively relates to leader personal vision.

Third, work engagement is a construct of the positive psychology movement, which prioritizes studies of human potential. Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) offered that engagement, “is about identifying and nurturing their strongest qualities . . . and helping them [sic - *people*] find niches in which they can best live out these strengths” (p. 6). Work engagement is defined as “a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigour [sic], dedication, and absorption” (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, & Bakker, 2002, p. 74). Thus, work engagement can be seen as a relational element between an individual and his or her work; that is, emotional and mental energy for and identification with the leader role. We propose that an understanding of self and others and the ability to manage self and others effectively will relate to a leader’s level of engagement at work. Initial work has shown such a relationship between ESC and organizational engagement (Mahon, Taylor, & Boyatzis, 2014). We seek to broaden this understanding by investigating the relationship between ESC and work engagement.

Hypothesis 1c: Leader ESC positively relates to leader work engagement.

Fourth, given that satisfaction is an emotional state based on an experienced event (Landy, 1985), career satisfaction can be considered a personal, emotionally based response to work-related events (Gattiker & Larwood, 1988). There is initial support showing that individuals who possess a high degree of ESC report a higher degree of career satisfaction, indicated by a positive empirical link between two constructs of ESC and career satisfaction (Amdurer, Boyatzis, Saatcioglu, Smith, & Taylor, 2014). In addition, career satisfaction has been found to be positively related to social capital (Ng, Eby, Sorensen, & Feldman, 2005), further emphasizing the relational element of the variable and its possible connection to leader ESC.

Hypothesis 1d: Leader ESC positively relates to leader career satisfaction.

Executive Coaching

Change in managerial or leader behaviors is the intended outcome of most executive coaching (Bennett & Bush, 2013; Feldman & Lankau, 2005; Kilburg, 2000; Wasylyshyn, 2003). Wasylyshyn (2003) reported that the majority of executive coaching engagements focused on desired behavior changes that would bolster executives’ career success. These changes included: personal behavior change (56%), enhancing leader effectiveness (43%), fostering stronger relationships (40%), personal development (17%), and work-family integration (7%; Wasylyshyn, 2003, pp. 99–100).

In business settings, coaching was initially reserved for CEOs and other top executives, giving birth to the term “executive coaching” (Baron & Morin, 2009). Though coaching resources are now more accessible to managers at many levels, it is common for the term executive coaching to be used interchangeably with coaching when the context is developmentally based support for leaders throughout the organization. As a result, both terms are applied throughout this paper.

Numerous definitions of executive coaching are found in the literature. For the purpose of this study, we found Joo’s (2005) definition to be highly relevant and applicable. Executive coaching is a “one-on-one relationship between a professional coach and an executive (coachee) for the purpose of enhancing coachee behavioral change through self-awareness and learning, and thus ultimately for the success of the individual and organization” (Joo, 2005, p. 468).

Supportive coaching relationships play a critical role in the pursuit of enduring individual change. Trusting relationships are essential as sources of support for individuals embarking upon personal change agendas (Boyatzis, 2006). In the growing literature on coaching, numerous researchers suggest a quality coaching relationship to be essential for effective coaching outcomes (Baron & Morin, 2009; Bennett, 2006; Boyce et al., 2010; Ely et al., 2010; Gregory & Levy, 2011; Gyllensten & Palmer, 2007; Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001). McCall, Lombardo, and Morrison (1988) emphasize the role of significant others and relationships in their study of the ways successful leaders change and develop at work. McCall et al. (1988) reported that “almost 20 percent of the key events in the careers of the executives we studied featured a specific person rather than an

assignment” (p. 67). This finding supports the growing recognition that people and relationships are important cornerstones for managerial and leader development.

Guided by these findings and the potential for coaching to relate to a leader’s ability to develop ESC, we predict that the quality of the coaching relationship, as perceived by the leader, will moderate the relationship between ESC and each of the four key leader outcomes. More specifically, we anticipate the relationship between ESC and desired leader outcomes to be strengthened in the presence of a high quality coaching relationship. This moderating role of coaching has been shown in prior research (Dahling, Taylor, Chau, & Dwight, 2016; Katz, Hunter, & Klowden, 2008; Rank & Gray, 2017; Wang, 2013), but those studies have not looked at whether the quality of the coaching relationship moderates the association between ESC and these leader outcomes. In fact, our investigation found little prior research that examined the moderating role of a coaching relationship on leader outcomes. We aim to address this gap in this study and propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 2a: A leader’s perception of the quality of a coaching relationship moderates the relationship between ESC and leader job performance, such that ESC will have a positive impact on leader job performance when the quality of the coaching relationship is perceived as high rather than low.

Hypothesis 2b: A leader’s perception of the quality of a coaching relationship moderates the relationship between ESC and leader personal vision, such that ESC will have a positive impact on leader personal vision when the quality of the coaching relationship is perceived as high rather than low.

Hypothesis 2c: A leader’s perception of the quality of a coaching relationship moderates the relationship between ESC and work engagement, such that ESC will have a positive impact on leader work engagement when the quality of the coaching relationship is perceived as high rather than low.

Hypothesis 2d: leader’s perception of the quality of a coaching relationship moderates the relationship between ESC and leader career satisfaction, such that ESC will have a positive impact on leader career satisfaction when the quality of the coaching relationship is perceived as high rather than low.

The proposed hypotheses are visually depicted in the conceptual model in [Figure 1](#), with the aim to explore the relationships between leader ESC, the perceived quality of the coaching relationship and four key leader outcomes.

Method

Participants and Procedure

A pilot field study was conducted at a Fortune 500 financial services firm headquartered in the Midwest. Institutional review board approval was obtained before starting the study. The firm embarked on a cultural transformation in the wake of the 2008 financial recession encouraging senior leaders to collaborate in new ways and drive significant organizational change throughout the organization. The firm partnered with a Midwestern university to design a development program with the aim to equip leaders with knowledge, self-awareness and EI to more effectively collaborate across the organization.

Sample. Eighty-five senior leaders participated in the pilot study from a sample population of 175 individuals, yielding an overall response rate of 49%. Invitation to the leadership development program was determined by the firm’s organization development unit and was based on the leader’s placement within the senior leadership of the firm. The sample was comprised of 57 male managers (67%) and 28 female managers (33%), which closely represented the gender composition of the larger invited sample for the organization (131 males, or 75% and 44 females, or 25%). The age of sample respondents for analysis ranged from 34 to 61 years old with an average age of 47 years old.

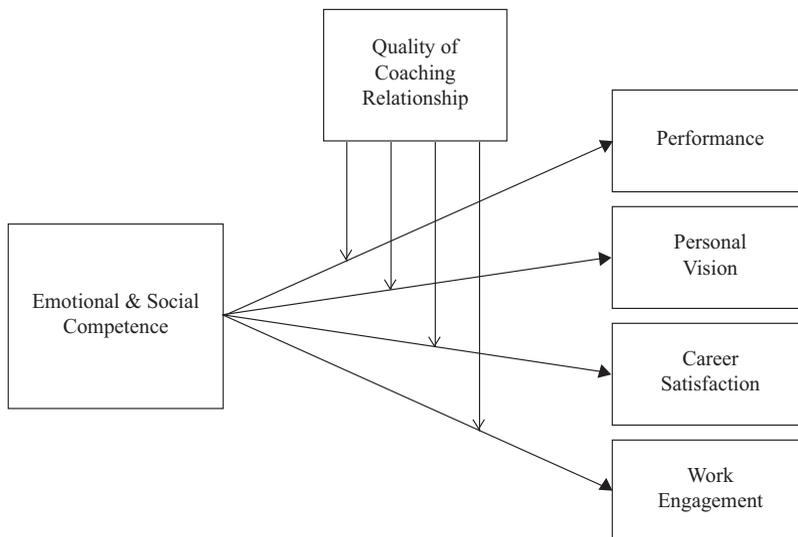


Figure 1. Conceptual research model.

Thirty-one percent of participants reported being in their role 2 years or less, 37% between 2 and 5 years, 26% between 5 and 10 years, and roughly 7% reported 10 years or more. Table 1 displays complete demographic descriptives.

Leader development program. The overall focus of the leader development program was to develop senior leaders’ ability to collaborate across business lines in pursuit of shared organizational goals, serve as champions of culture change, and improve their overall leadership effectiveness. The

Table 1
Demographic Descriptives

Descriptive	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Frequency	%
Sex	1.33	.473		
Male			57	67.1
Female			28	32.9
Age	47.39	6.220		
Race	1.16	.065		
Caucasian			78	91.8
African American			4	4.7
Asian			0	0
Latino			2	2.4
Native American			1	1.2
Other			0	0
Education	3.89	1.145		
High school diploma or equivalent			4	4.7
Associate degree			0	0
Undergraduate degree			36	42.4
Partial completion of graduate course			6	7.1
Graduate degree			39	45.9
Years in role	3.76	1.900		
Years at company	6.80	1.870		

Note. *N* = 85.

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program involved two days of classroom instruction on emotional and social intelligence, participation in a multirater feedback assessment on ESC, and postprogram executive coaching support. Participants and raters completed a 360-degree feedback instrument online prior to the leader development program, and the feedback was revealed to participants and subsequently reviewed with a facilitator during the workshop. The raters were selected by the leader in the categories of manager, direct report, peer, client, and other. Only the “total-other” rating (an average of all rater groups, except self, aggregated together) was used in this study.

Ten executive coaches from a Midwestern university conducted the coaching engagement with paired participants upon completion of the training program. Each leader completed two coaching meetings, both conducted over the phone. This coaching process followed the intentional change theory (ICT) framework (Boyatzis, 2008, 2018; Smith, Van Oosten, & Boyatzis, 2009), which is different than traditional coaching engagements and extends beyond facilitated feedback. ICT-based coaching emphasizes discovery of the ideal self and personal vision and developing a trusting, supportive relationship with the coachee. The first coaching session centered on helping the leader discover and define his or her passion, purpose, and values, culminating in a personal vision. The second coaching session focused on reviewing and interpreting the 360-degree feedback in light of the individual’s personal vision and identifying areas of development. These desired areas for development were then used by the leader to create a personal learning plan.

Measures

Survey data was collected from study participants, measuring objective and subjective leader outcomes including leader work engagement, career satisfaction, personal vision and perceptions of the quality of the coaching relationship. Survey data was triangulated with an annual job performance rating provided by the organization and multirater feedback data on ESC. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed to test the hypotheses. An overview of each study variable is described below.

Emotional Competence Inventory (ECI). ESC was measured using the ECI (Version 2.0 [ECI-2]; Boyatzis & Goleman, 2002). This instrument is comprised of 72 items and measures how frequently an individual demonstrates behaviors in each of the 18 ESC categories that cluster into Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, and Relationship Management (Boyatzis, Gaskin, & Wei, 2010; Boyatzis & Sala, 2004). Table 2 shows the ESCs measured by the ECI-2.

Sample items include “How often does (leader) exhibit the following behavior: recognizes the situations that arouse strong emotions in him/her?” and “reflects on underlying reasons for feelings?” Responses were compiled by the Hay Group, an external, independent consulting firm. Prior research shows acceptable reliability and validity of the ECI-2, good model fit, and convergent and divergent scale validity based upon a sample of 67,000 participants (Boyatzis & Gaskin, 2010; Wolff, 2006).

The four dependent variables include: job performance, personal vision, work engagement, and career satisfaction. Brief descriptions and sample items for each measure are provided below.

Job performance. Leader job performance was measured using annual performance ratings provided by the organization. The performance measure included a combined rating based on two weighted assessments: (a) leader performance against explicit business goals, which accounted for 85% of the total, and (c) demonstration of leadership competencies as rated by others, which accounted for 15% of the total performance rating. The performance ratings represented a manager’s assessment of a leader’s performance during a single calendar year. The final performance rating was completed on a 5-point scale, from 1 (*Far Below Expectations*) to 5 (*Far Above Expectations*).

Personal vision. Personal vision is an expressed statement of an individual’s ideal self. The personal vision construct was measured by the Ideal Self Test (IST; Boyatzis, Buse, & Taylor, 2010). The IST measures both the comprehensiveness of the leader’s personal vision, that is, “My personal vision includes my values and philosophy” and their feelings about it, that is, “I am excited about my personal vision.” Buse and Bilimoria (2014) tested the validity and reliability of the IST on a scale of 20 items. In the present study, we conducted an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) on the 20 items and found 16 items to load onto a single factor with a Cronbach’s alpha rating of .94.

Table 2
Emotional and Social Competencies Measured by the Emotional Competence Inventory (ECI-2)

Cluster	Competency
Self-Awareness	Emotional self-awareness Accurate self-assessment Self-confidence
Self-Management	Emotional self-control Transparency Adaptability Achievement orientation Initiative Optimism
Social Awareness	Empathy Organizational awareness Service orientation
Relationship Management	Developing others Inspirational leadership Change catalyst Influence Conflict management Teamwork and collaboration

These items were theoretically relevant to the aspect of the ideal self most pertinent to our study of leader personal vision. Specifically, participants were encouraged to consider and articulate their values, dreams, passions, and desired leader behavior, which are all elements of the personal vision. Buse and Bilimoria (2014), for example, enrolled the use of the IST when studying personal vision as it relates to both retention and work engagement.

Work engagement. The terms work engagement and engagement are used interchangeably throughout this paper but refer to the same construct. The dependent variable of leader work engagement was measured by the 17-item Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES; Schaufeli, Martinez, Pinto, Salanova, & Bakker, 2002). Comprised of three dimensions of vigor, dedication, and absorption, the UWES includes statements about how an individual feels about work. Sample questions include: “I am enthusiastic about my job” and “When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work.” As a result of an EFA, 10 items on one factor were ultimately used to measure work engagement with a reliability rating of .91.

Career satisfaction. Leader career satisfaction was measured through the well-established five-item survey developed by Greenhaus, Parasuraman, and Wormley (1990). A sample item is: “I am satisfied with the success I have achieved in my career.” Internal consistency was strong at .84.

Quality of the coaching relationship. The moderating variable of perceived quality of the coaching relationship was measured by two instruments: the Positive and Negative Emotional Attractor Survey (PNEA; Boyatzis, 2008) and the Perceived Quality of the Employee Coaching Relationship Instrument (PQECR; Gregory & Levy, 2011). The PNEA Survey captures the overall emotional tone of the relationship between the executive coach and the leader as perceived by the leader. Thirteen items were adapted from the original 20-item PNEA Survey. Sample questions include: “I enjoy working with my coach” and “I trust my coach.” The PQECR includes 12 items and measures four dimensions of a coaching relationship: genuineness of the relationship, effective communication, comfort with the relationship, and the extent to which the relationship facilitated development as captured by questions such as “I feel safe being open and honest with my coach” and “My coach and I have mutual respect for one another.” In total, as a result of the EFA, 15 items—five from the PNEA and 10 from the PQECR—were used to measure the quality of the coaching relationship. The 15-item scale reliability was .97.

Measurement Validation

An EFA was conducted on all of the measures to ensure each scale contributed to its own unique factor. With the exception of ESC, each of the measures loaded onto its own unique factor with primary loadings at or above .40. The EFA on our ESC measure resulted in primary loadings below .40 for six of the 18 original competencies; thus, they were removed from further analysis. With the elimination of the six competencies, the remaining 12 competencies were also analyzed using an EFA. The results showed that the remaining 12 competencies clustered strongly onto two factors, suggesting a two-dimensional structure. The two dimensions were conceptualized as Emotional Acumen competencies and Change Leader competencies.

Emotional Acumen included the competencies of Accurate Self-Assessment, Empathy, Emotional Self-Awareness, Emotional Self-Control, Transparency, Teamwork and Collaboration, and Optimism. Emotional Acumen was selected as a label in recognition of observable threads uniting these subscales such as an individual’s keen awareness of his or her emotional state and discernment of that awareness in intrapersonal and interpersonal situations.

Change Leader included the competencies of Achievement, Change Catalyst, Initiative, Inspirational Leadership, and Self-Confidence. We selected the term Change Leader to describe the subscales that embody competencies demonstrated when leading change initiatives. One of the critiques of the ECI-2 measure has been whether the competencies were emotionally based, or whether they were simply more generic leader competencies (McEnrue & Groves, 2006). The Emotional Acumen competencies are immediately recognizable as being emotionally related. Yet when we consider the work of the leader to be a catalyst for change or inspire followers, the Change Leader competencies represent an individual’s ability to effectively deal with one’s emotions just as much as the more apparently related Emotional Acumen competencies. Table 3 shows the competencies in the two-factor ESC model. We conducted internal consistency analysis, yielding a reliability of .94 for Emotional Acumen and .89 for Change Leader.

The two-factor ESC model closely paralleled a similar analysis completed by Boyatzis and Sala (2004) on the ECI-2. In their examination, Boyatzis and Sala (2004) found the competencies to empirically cluster onto two factors, which they named Working with Others and Influencing Change. Comparing the Boyatzis and Sala (2004) EFA study with the present study, the loading of competencies on two different factors and the essential thread in each of the factors (e.g., leading change) were nearly identical.

Results

Following the EFA, we tested the constructs by examining internal consistency and convergent and discriminant validity. Scale reliabilities (i.e., internal consistencies) for each of the constructs examined in the study were strong, with values ranging between .84 and .97. Because job performance is a single-item measure, it did not require internal consistency testing. Cronbach’s alpha scores are presented along the diagonal in Table 4.

Table 3
Two-Factor Composition of Emotional and Social Competence

Emotional Acumen	Change Leader
Accurate self-assessment	Achievement
Empathy	Change catalyst
Emotional self-awareness	Initiative
Emotional self-control	Inspirational leadership
Transparency	Self-confidence
Teamwork and collaboration	
Optimism	

Table 4
Construct Correlations With Cronbach's Alphas and Average Variance Extracted

Construct	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Emotional Acumen	3.36	.23	(.94)	.47**	.08	.01	-.02	.15	.36**
2. Change Leader	3.46	.21	.47**	(.89)	.33**	.08	.19	.25*	.21
3. Performance			.08	.33**	^(a)	.07	.03	.16	.05
4. Personal vision	6.34	.50	.01	.08	.07	(.94)	.20	.22*	.48**
5. Work engagement	6.42	.60	-.02	.19	.03	.20	(.91)	.33*	.22*
6. Career satisfaction	4.27	.57	.15	.25*	.16	.22*	.33**	(.84)	.30**
7. Coaching relationship	5.12	.71	.36**	.21	.05	.48**	.22*	.3**	(.97)
Average variance extracted			.75	.71		.58	.60	.65	.71
SqRt average variance extracted			.86	.84		.76	.77	.84	.84

Note. $N = 83$. For data in bold, diagonal entries are coefficient alpha reliability estimates. SqRt = square root.
^a Performance variable is a single-item construct, so no reliability estimates or variance calculations are provided.

* $p < .05$, two-tailed. ** $p < .01$, two-tailed.

Convergent and discriminant validity were calculated for the constructs using the average variance extracted method (AVE; Fornell & Larcker, 1981), which provides the AVE by the factor from its indicators or items across the individual items of a factor (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; MacKenzie, Podsakoff, & Podsakoff, 2011). Convergent validity is established because all factors have an AVE greater than 0.50, meaning variance shared between each of the constructs and its measures is greater than any unexplained error (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). To establish discriminant validity at the construct level, the correlations between factors and square root of the AVE are compared, as shown in Table 4. All study constructs demonstrated discriminant validity since the square root of average variance explained for each factor was greater than or equal to the correlations between that factor and all other factors (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). These results, along with construct correlations, means, and standard deviations, are summarized in Table 4.

To test our hypotheses, we employed SEM as our analytical approach because it permits the simultaneous examination of dependent relationships among constructs (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006). The absolute and relative goodness-of-fit statistics were strongest for the solution in which dependent variables regressed onto the two-dimensional model of Emotional Acumen and Change Leader, giving us confidence in making inferences from the results ($\chi^2 = 7.3$, $df = 6$, $p > .05$; Tucker-Lewis index = .954; comparative fit index = .992; root-mean-square error of approximation = .05, p close = .424). The model included the quality of the coaching relationship as a moderator between each of the two dimensions of the ESC construct and the dependent variables (Figure 2).

The first set of hypotheses predicted that ESC has a direct, positive impact on each of the four leader outcome measures (H_{1a} – H_{1d} ; i.e., job performance, personal vision, work engagement, and career satisfaction). Based on the model, H_{1a} and H_{1c} were partially supported. The Change Leader ESC dimension had a direct, positive relationship with leader job performance (H_{1a} ; $\beta = .378$; $p = .001$). Because its p value was within three one-thousandths of a decimal point, we considered leader work engagement to also be directly and positively related to Change Leader ESC (H_{1c} ; $\beta = .220$; $p = .053$). In contrast, Emotional Acumen ESC did not have a statistically significant effect on any of the leader outcome variables. A full summary of results for H_{1a} through H_{1d} can be viewed in Table 5.

The second set of hypotheses anticipated that the quality of the coaching relationship moderates the relationship between ESC and the four key leader outcomes (i.e., H_{2a} through H_{2d}), such that ESC will have a positive relationship with leader outcomes when the perceived quality of the coaching relationship is high. In the test of the path model, partial support was found for H_{2c} and H_{2d} . H_{2c} suggested that the relationship between ESC and leader work engagement would be greater

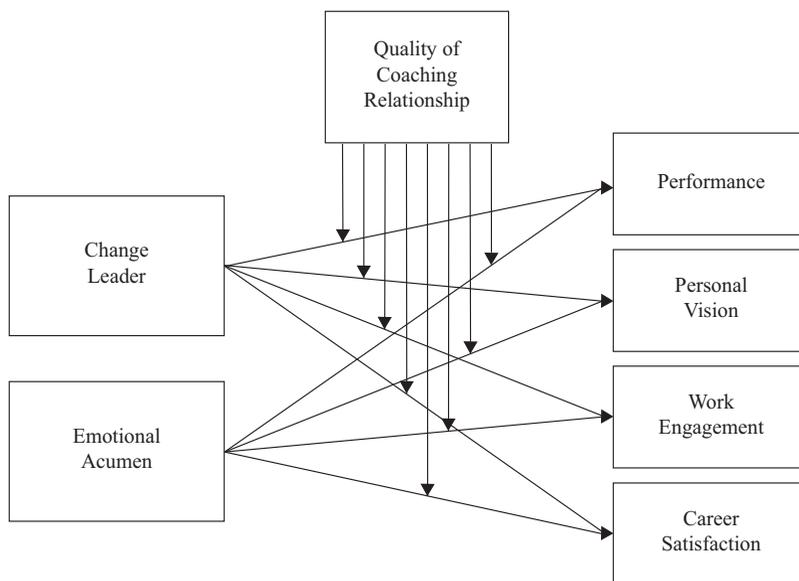


Figure 2. Final research model.

when the perceived quality of the coaching relationship is high. Results of the SEM showed a statistically significant positive interaction effect on the relationship between Emotional Acumen ESC and work engagement ($\beta = .207; p = .040$). As hypothesized, a perceived high quality coaching relationship strengthened the positive connection between Emotional Acumen ESC and leader work engagement. Conversely, the interaction of quality of the coaching relationship and Change Leader ESC decreased leader work engagement ($\beta = -.263; p = .031$). That is, the presence of high Change Leader ESC was shown to associate with lower leader work engagement, resulting in the rejection of H_{2c} with regard to the Change Leader ESC dimension.

Analysis of H_{2d} , which anticipated a positive moderating effect of quality of the coaching relationship on the connection between ESC and career satisfaction, also resulted in partial support. The perceived high quality coaching relationship positively moderated the relationship between Emotional Acumen ESC and leader career satisfaction ($\beta = .225; p = .023$). Conversely, the quality of the coaching relationship negatively moderated the relationship between Change Leader ESC and career satisfaction at a statistically significant level ($\beta =$

Table 5
Summary of Hypothesis 1 Results

	Emotional and social competence factors			
	Change Leader		Emotional Acumen	
	<i>B</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>p</i>
Hypothesis 1: Direct effects model				
H1: Leader emotional and social competence positively relates to key leader outcomes.				
a: Leader emotional and social competence positively relates to performance	.378	.001	-.102	.403
b: Leader emotional and social competence positively relates to personal vision	.063	.541	-.204	.061
c: Leader emotional and social competence positively relates to work engagement	.220	.053	-.197	.099
d: Leader emotional and social competence positively relates to career satisfaction	.184	.098	-.015	.895

-.307; $p = .010$). Said another way, when the perceived quality of the coaching relationship was high, Change Leader ESC predicted a decrease in leader career satisfaction. This result led us to reject H_{2d} relative to the Change Leader ESC dimension. The summary of results for H_{2a} through H_{2d} are shown in Table 6.

Further analysis of the SEM results revealed statistically significant direct effects between the quality of the coaching relationship and three of the four operationalized leader outcome measures. Specifically, quality of the coaching relationship had the greatest significant, positive relationship with personal vision ($\beta = .626$; $p < .001$), which—although unexpected—is not surprising, given the emphasis of personal vision in the ICT-based coaching process used as part of the organization's leader development program. Additional positive direct effects were found between quality of the coaching relationship and career satisfaction ($\beta = .332$; $p = .006$), and quality of the coaching relationship and work engagement ($\beta = .318$; $p = .010$).

In summary, three main findings result from this empirical investigation: (a) leader ESC has a positive direct effect with job performance and work engagement (via Change Leader competencies), (b) quality of the coaching relationship positively moderates the relationship between leader ESC and both work engagement and career satisfaction (via Emotional Acumen competencies), and (c) quality of the coaching relationship positively relates to work engagement, career satisfaction, and a leader's ability to express a comprehensive personal vision.

Discussion

Findings from this pilot study highlight significant relationships of specific ESCs, as well as the moderating and direct effects of the perceived quality of the coaching relationship, with select leader outcomes. The Change Leader ESC dimension was found to have a positive relationship with the key leader outcomes of job performance and work engagement. The perceived quality of the coaching relationship positively moderated the Emotional Acumen ESC dimension and the leader outcomes of work engagement and career satisfaction. As a reminder, the Emotional Acumen dimension incorporates ESCs such as emotional self-control, transparency, empathy, collaboration,

Table 6
Summary of Hypothesis 2 Results

Hypothesis 2: Moderation	Emotional and social competence factors			
	Change Leader		Emotional Acumen	
	<i>B</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>p</i>
H2: Leader perception of the quality of a coaching relationship moderates the relationship between emotional and social competence and key leader outcomes.				
a: Leader perception of quality of a coaching relationship moderates the relationship between emotional and social competence and performance	.023	.852	-.054	.599
b: Leader perception of quality of a coaching relationship moderates the relationship between emotional and social competence and personal vision	.157	.160	.026	.775
c: Leader perception of quality of a coaching relationship moderates the relationship between emotional and social competence and work engagement	-.263	.031	.207	.040
d: Leader perception of quality of a coaching relationship moderates the relationship between emotional and social competence and career satisfaction	-.307	.010	.225	.023

and optimism. These competencies primarily represent self-regulation and regulation of one's self in relation to others. The Change Leader dimension includes achievement orientation, self-confidence, change catalyst, initiative, and inspirational leadership. In essence, the Change Leader ESCs incorporate an active component and an outward orientation.

We found that Change Leader competencies have a significant positive relationship with the job performance of a leader. This implies that leaders who demonstrate high levels of the Change Leader competencies are also more likely to have their job performance rated more highly than others with lower levels of ESC. This insight supports Goleman's (1998) original proposal that ESCs are essential for effective leader performance in the workplace. Our finding also extends previous empirical work examining the link between affective-related constructs and a variety of performance outcomes (Cherniss, 2010; Lacerenza et al., 2017; Rosete & Ciarrochi, 2005; Walter et al., 2011; Wong et al., 2004).

Hopkins and Bilimoria (2008) in their study of 105 bank executives found that many of the same competencies distinguished successful leaders from other bankers. Specifically, achievement orientation, self-confidence, change catalyst, and inspirational leadership characterized the most successful performing bank leaders from their colleagues. This interesting connection merits further attention to examine if this is a unique characterization of leaders in financial services.

We also found that Change Leader competencies have a significant positive relationship with work engagement. A potential explanation might be that leaders who are high in Change Leader competencies, such as initiative, achievement orientation, and self-confidence, are motivated to actively set and exceed high standards of excellence engaging them in their work (Goleman et al., 2002). Work engagement is characterized by energy, involvement and efficacy (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001) and is the direct opposite of burnout (Maslach et al., 2001; Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006). This suggests that the closer the match between a leader's unique qualities with his or her job and organizational environment, the higher the levels of increased energy, efficacy, joy, and fulfillment the individual will experience. Indeed, Wiens and McKee (2016) recently found that chief medical officers report high levels of stress in their jobs but low burnout due to their levels of ESC. And in the present study, the financial sales environment invited challenge, initiative, and a drive toward achievement. Thus, those with higher Change Leader competencies may be more closely matched with the requirements of their role.

In contrast, we found that Change Leader ESC did not relate at a statistically significant level to leaders' personal vision or career satisfaction. We believe this may stem from the organizational priority placed on financial outcomes as leader performance was measured by achievement of financial results. Although there may be a greater fit between competencies and role requirements that lead to higher work engagement, it is possible that the emphasis on rewarding financial results in our sample prevented an opportunity to explore ambitions and aspirations or consider personal satisfaction derived from achieving those results. In addition, the timing of this pilot study followed on the heels of the 2008 financial recession. Financial leaders may have been dissatisfied with the state of the industry as a whole.

Similarly, Emotional Acumen competencies did not significantly relate to any of the four leader outcome variables. A possible explanation is that historically this organization assessed leader outcomes and rewarded performance based on achievement of financial results and the demonstrated efforts to reach them. In that environment, competencies such as emotional self-awareness, self-control, and empathy were considered irrelevant or, at a minimum, nonessential for success.

The examination of this finding is an important area for future research given that ESC and various clusters of ESC competencies have predicted a number of outcomes (e.g., Amdurer et al., 2014; Boyatzis, Rochford, & Cavanagh, 2017; Hopkins & Bilimoria, 2008; Taylor & Hood, 2011). However, many of the studies using ESC competencies aggregate ESC competencies into a single factor (e.g., Boyatzis et al., 2017; Hopkins & Bilimoria, 2008; Taylor & Hood, 2011) rather than looking at the impact of a cluster of competencies, as we have done here with Change Leader and Emotional Acumen. Perhaps more importantly, given the results of this study and other studies where such aggregation has occurred, future research should begin to look at the impact of individual competencies and their effect on leader outcomes. Future multirater assessment research

should begin to venture beyond the tendency to aggregate into a single ESC factor or cluster factor and look at what can be learned from individual ESC competencies themselves.

Our second set of hypotheses proposed an interaction effect between the perceived quality of the coaching relationship and ESC on leader outcomes, such that the connection between ESC and desired leader outcomes would be strengthened in the presence of a high quality coaching relationship. Results showed support for the hypotheses of an interactive effect on both work engagement and career satisfaction. More specifically, the interaction of the Emotional Acumen ESC and the perception of a high quality coaching relationship positively related to these key leader outcomes.

The concept of high-quality connections (HQC) may help to explain our results. HQC are established in the experience of a great coaching relationship. [Dutton and Heaphy \(2003\)](#) characterize HQCs as having high emotional carrying capacity and generative connectivity. The experience of an HQC leaves people with heightened feelings of vitality, energy, and positive regard ([Quinn & Dutton, 2005](#)). These connections expand the potential for self-awareness and learning. Our study supports the idea that when the coaching relationship is characterized by an HQC, the leader is encouraged to be more open and to engage in deeper self-reflection. This deeper engagement with the self through the quality coaching experience may enable greater engagement with the work and a deeper sense of satisfaction with one's career.

The perceived quality of the coaching relationship did not moderate the relationship between either Change Leader or Emotional Acumen ESC and leader personal vision or job performance. One possible explanation for this is that since individuals high in Change Leader competencies often demonstrate strengths in achievement orientation, they may operate more independently and rely less on others. As discussed earlier, the financial leaders in the present sample were trained and acculturated in a strong sales oriented culture and leaders were evaluated primarily on individual achievement of financial results. The coaching relationship invited the individuals to identify a personal vision and conceptualize a holistic, aspirational personal and professional future beyond their day-to-day transactions. Therefore, the coaching engagement may have been experienced as unhelpful or irrelevant, introducing dissonance into the coaching relationship and dissatisfaction within the leader. In an early study on the relationship between, among other predictor variables, EI and organizational performance, [Murensky \(2000\)](#) found a negative relationship between the financial and learning dimensions of organizational performance and inferred that an organizational focus on achievement of financial objectives over capability building may have negatively impacted learning and development on the part of the leader. Finally, the timing of the pilot study occurred in the wake of the 2008 financial market crash; thus, it is possible that some leaders viewed the coaching relationship as less of a priority and were subsequently less engaged, given their preoccupation with unexpected reverberations of the financial crisis.

With regard to those higher in Emotional Acumen ESC, we wonder if the lack of moderation effect is related to the limited number of coaching sessions. [Lacerenza and colleagues \(2017\)](#) found in their meta-analysis that multiple developmental sessions spanning a period of time had a more significant influence on transfer of learning into practice and results than a single massed form of training. In the case of job performance, perhaps more time with an executive coach would have shown a statistically significant relationship. A review generalizing findings from psychotherapeutic research to bolster coaching techniques ([McKenna & Davis, 2009](#)) reported that only 30% of systematic variance in psychotherapy outcomes are based on the "alliance" or relationship between psychologist and client; client extratherapeutic factors (i.e., factors related to the client outside of the therapeutic relationship) account for 40%, while placebo or hope, and theory and technique each account for 15% of outcome variance. Thus, it may also be that other individual and organizational factors need to be considered and controlled for in future coaching outcomes research.

In the case of leader personal vision, we did find (see [Table 4](#)) a strong correlation between the quality of the coaching relationship and leader personal vision such that the effect of the coaching relationship in the context of this particular development program was helpful regardless of the level of ESC. This finding was not surprising given that with ICT-based coaching, the coach encourages the coachee's discovery of his or her dreams, hopes, values, and purpose, which culminates in the

crafting of a personal vision and emphasizes a trusting, supportive coaching relationship (Boyatzis, 2008, 2018; Smith et al., 2009). However, because of the relationships between ESC and leader outcomes as well as the relationships between executive coaching, ESC, and job performance and leader personal vision, potential interdependencies exist that provide a basis for future research.

Although not originally hypothesized, results showed a direct positive connection between the perceived quality of the coaching relationship and personal vision. Said another way, we found that the higher the quality of the coaching relationship as perceived by the leader, the greater the ability of the leader to express a personal vision. With this increased capacity, the leader can access hopes and dreams, which—as elements of the ideal self—form a powerful catalyst for enduring self-directed change (Boyatzis & Akrivou, 2006). Interpreting our results through the neuroscience studies of Boyatzis and Jack (2018) provides further insight. Boyatzis and Jack (2018) found that ICT-based coaching, also referred to as *coaching with compassion* (see also Boyatzis, Smith, & Beveridge, 2013; Smith et al., 2009), activates the default mode network in the brain and results in an increase of cognitive, emotional and hormonal openness in the person being coached. This leads the coachee to be more likely to be in a state of the positive emotional attractor in which s/he is able to be more open to new ideas and people and to imagine a desired future (see also Boyatzis et al., 2015; Passarelli, 2015). In contrast, a different approach to coaching—*coaching for compliance*—is what is used most often in corporate development programs. Coaching for compliance emphasizes a focus on gaps and weaknesses and sense making of feedback facilitated by a coach. Boyatzis and Jack (2018) found this often leads to a person being in the negative emotional attractor state, which narrows an individual's capacity to be open to learning and to others. These findings help to explain the positive impact that we found a quality coaching relationship may have on the creation of a personal vision.

As one form of helping relationships, external coaches often represent a safe haven for leaders navigating the challenges of organizational life. Leaders are able to reflect and dialogue with a trusted colleague who remains focused on their development but not tainted by internal politics or supervisory obligations. Senior leaders often suffer from “CEO disease,” where isolation from informal social networks increases with every promotion up the hierarchical ladder (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005). The relationship with an empathetic, compassionate coach evokes positive emotions and enables leaders to become more open cognitively, emotionally, and physically, leading to beneficial individual and organizational outcomes (Boyatzis & Jack, 2018; Boyatzis et al., 2015; Boyatzis, Smith, & Blaize, 2006; Passarelli, 2015).

Further analysis indicated additional effects between coaching relationship quality and both work engagement and career satisfaction. Overall, a leader's work engagement and career satisfaction grows as the perception of a high quality coaching relationship increases, irrespective of the demonstrated set of competencies. This alone is an important contribution to the fields of organizational behavior and management education as it provides additional empirical support for the importance of quality of coaching relationships for workplace outcomes. To date, empirically evidenced coaching outcomes have significantly lagged behind case studies and conceptual pieces in the academic literature (Ely et al., 2010).

Limitations

A number of limitations exist within this research, potentially hampering the generalizability of the results. Small samples can be problematic and tend to be less generalizable. When using SEM as a data analysis strategy, the results may be subject to sampling or selection effects. More reliable findings could be possible if this study could be repeated with a greater number of participants.

Second, the selection of a single organization controlled for context in this study, but also limited generalizability of the results. Replicating the study with multisite organizations or multiple organizations across a variety of industry sectors would boost the applicability of the findings. Examining leaders from other financial services firms, leaders representing other industries, or perhaps leaders in global organizations would take into account a broader set of cultural issues, which, in turn, could test the research model in different contexts. In addition, the timing of this study occurred in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis in the United States. We can only speculate

the potential impact that the broader environment may have had on the findings. Therefore, future studies are needed to further understand the potential influence of context.

Third, job performance is positioned as a key leader outcome, but it is a subjective evaluation of leader performance by the supervisor, based on achievement of agreed-upon business goals and perceived leadership qualities. Measuring performance in this way is akin to measuring success within the organization (Luthans, 1998), which carries limitations. Performance is a complex construct and may include numerous contributing factors beyond goal attainment and demonstration of leadership qualities. For example, a senior leader's role often involves running a function or part of the business, interacting with key stakeholders internal and external to the firm and building and maintaining important relationships. A single numerical measure falls short of capturing the holistic and widespread nature of the role. Finally, a single subjective assessment by one individual is inherently limited in that senior leaders typically have a wide sphere of influence and interact with a diverse group of stakeholders beyond the manager. Integrating objective performance data, such as actual sales results against forecast, would be ideal although often elusive in field studies.

Another limitation is that the coaching engagement consisted of only two sessions. Extending the process beyond the boundaries of two sessions to a longer coaching engagement could also potentially expand the contributions to client outcomes.

Implications for Research and Practice

This study has both research and practical implications. Findings confirm that ESCs are related to desired workplace outcomes of job performance, work engagement, and career satisfaction. ESC has been linked to workplace outcomes such as performance and job satisfaction in previous work. In addition, this study examined emotional competence. It would be fruitful to consider the impact of other factors including other measures of EI, cognitive ability, and personality.

This pilot study begins to expand our understanding by examining the impact of ESC on the additional construct of work engagement. Given the popularity of engagement research, the significant relationship established between ESC and work engagement is beneficial to the growing field of positive psychology and worth further investigation.

This research provides an important empirical study in a real-time organizational setting with senior executives versus a lab setting with college students often found in the social science literature. In addition, the incorporation of a multirater assessment instrument used to measure ESC contributes to the literature as many studies use a self-report instrument, which has bias limitations. Namely, it has been consistently shown that people are both biased and unreliable when they assess their own abilities (Dunning, 2005; Dunning, Heath, & Suls, 2004; Mabe & West, 1982; Podsakoff & Organ, 1986).

This study also provides empirical confirmation of the important role that quality of the coaching relationship serves in leader and organization development. Quality of the coaching relationship positively moderates the relationship between Emotional Acumen ESC and work engagement and career satisfaction, as well as directly relates with personal vision, career satisfaction, and work engagement. Similar to engagement, the coaching relationship represents a construct garnering increased attention among scholars. These findings may be applicable to future studies examining the relationship between executive coaching, ESC, and important leader outcomes. Future replication and improvement upon the present pilot study, using a larger sample size, are research avenues worth exploring, including whether coaching style differences may be a variable of interest. Similarly, another dimension worth considering is the extent to which task-focused—in contrast to relationally focused—coaches work more effectively with change leaders.

Several practical implications stem from this research. Findings demonstrate that ESC and quality of the coaching relationship can have significant impact on the outcomes of organizational leaders. Statistical results herein serve as encouragement for organizations concerned with development of leadership talent to introduce coaching or boost existing coaching initiatives to enhance learning and development. Organization development practitioners, human resources managers, and

consultants would be keen to incorporate EI training and couple coaching with 360-feedback to optimize the ROI of leader development initiatives.

Individuals and organizations involved in the procurement of external coaching services will benefit to prioritize relationship-building skills in their hiring criteria. Similarly, organizations focused on coach training will benefit from the establishment of quality of the coaching relationship as an essential ingredient of important leader and workplace outcomes.

Conclusion

This study examined the influence of ESC and the quality of the coaching relationship on key leader outcomes of job performance, personal vision, work engagement and career satisfaction. Results indicated that leader ESC and perceived quality of the coaching relationship contribute to these outcomes. Findings revealed that externally focused ESCs (i.e., Change Leader ESC dimension) directly and positively related to leader job performance and work engagement, and the presence of a perceived high quality coaching relationship positively strengthened the relationship between the Emotional Acumen ESC dimension and both career satisfaction and work engagement. The present study also revealed that the perceived quality of the coaching relationship has a direct, positive relationship with leader work engagement, career satisfaction, and expression of a personal vision.

Few studies report empirical evidence of the quality of coaching relationship on workplace outcomes. Fewer still provide more than cross-sectional data. The present study not only revealed these findings and triangulated self-reported data with 360-degree feedback, but also reported the moderation effect of ESCs and the quality of coaching relationships on key leader outcomes. With that in mind, these results may be of particular benefit to scholars interested in leader development, leader effectiveness, EI, and coaching relationships in the workplace. Professional coaches may also consider these results beneficial to their coaching practice, raising awareness as to the importance of the quality of the relationship between coach and coachee.

The sample population included leaders in the finance sector, heavily driven by sales and rewarded handsomely for meeting and achieving challenging targets. Even this population, however, experienced a statistically significant benefit from the investment the company made in its leaders through leadership programs that included coaching and 360-degree feedback. Tangible, monetary rewards are an important part of a total remuneration package, yet as we can see through the results, investing in less tangible but still salient elements of a leader's development may make a positive difference in leader engagement, performance, and satisfaction.

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