

3 Developing Emotional Intelligence In Leaders: A Qualitative Research Approach

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Research is presented that explored the experiences of effective U.S. federal government leaders in developing their own emotional intelligence. The contribution to this journal is exploring how emotional intelligence is developed within adults using a qualitative, phenomenological research orientation. Specifically, this study contributes towards a greater understanding of the evolving relationship between EI, adult learning, and leadership; and the vitality of qualitative research. Recommendations for theory and implications for future research and practice are explored.

Introduction

This research (Rude, 2013) was a phenomenological study of the experiences of effective Federal government leaders in developing their emotional intelligence (EI). The study was undertaken to illuminate perceptions on how leader development, adult learning, and EI can be better integrated, and how Federal government leaders can be developed to optimally leverage intelligence and emotions. In so doing, the Federal government may be able to more effectively and responsibly develop leaders with the cognitive and emotional capacities needed to lead in a dynamic and complex adaptive system (Buckley, 1968; Schwandt, 2005; Yukl, 2012). Integrating EI and experiential/situated learning variables within research (particularly as regards Federal government leaders) has thus far been sparse and, as important, remains critical. Leaving EI development unattended may have contributed to troubling gaps within EI-related competencies (e.g., conflict management, interpersonal skills) for at least one Federal agency (Department of Defense, 2008, 2009).

The study leveraged the extensive experiences, careers, and lifespans of executives within the Federal government who won the Presidential Rank Award, a highly prestigious recognition bestowed annually by the President of the United States. The stringent criteria for that award include EI-related attributes, such as leading people and nurturing productive relationships. Using the Nelson and Low (2011) EI framework for personal excellence, experiential learning theory (Dewey (1916, 1938); Illeris (2007, 2009, 2011); Kolb (1984)), and situated learning theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991) as core constructual elements, this study provided a rich description of how Federal government leaders experienced the development of their own EI. Although the scope of this study did not

advocate a particular leadership theory, the essence of the experiences shared for this study amplified the connection between leadership, leader development, and EI (Goleman, 1995, 1998; Nelson & Low, 2011; Yukl, 2010).

This study was based on the ability-based Nelson and Low (2011) transformative EI learning model, which was previously validated (Hammett, 2007; Nelson, Low, & Vela, 2011). Four specific leadership skills within the Nelson and Low (2011) framework are: (a) social awareness (comfort); (b) empathy; (c) decision making; and (d) (personal) leadership. These skills may begin as intrapersonal in nature, but manifest in an interpersonal (or social) context. As identified by participant testimonies for this study, myriad experiences over the course of one's career and life journey (both inside and outside their Federal government careers) provide opportunities for developing and influencing EI. While some developmental activities – especially those that are highly experiential in nature, such as rotational assignments – are intentionally designed to hone EI, many participants cited unintentional incidents as defining moments in the EI milieu.

Accordingly, significance to the voices of study participants through this transcendental phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994) approach revealed unique, individual perspectives on developmental experiences that shaped the EI of these effective leaders. By using Moustakas (1994) techniques such as epoche and horizontalization, the researcher was able to glean a meaningful array of perspectives that should shed further light on EI's relevance vis-à-vis leadership (and vice versa), and instrumental thoughts on helpful developmental interventions.

The sections that follow describe the problem statement and research question, followed by a

discourse on the phenomenological method used. Then, the study's findings and conclusions will be discussed as well as, implications for research, theory, and practice.

Problem Statement and Research Question

The EI of Federal government leaders appears to be lacking, as evidenced by pronounced interpersonal skills and conflict management competency gaps that arose in surveys administered to thousands of leaders in a large Federal government agency (DoD, 2008, 2009). This is problematic, as interpersonal skills and conflict management are critical EI competencies (Goleman, 2011). Compounding this issue is the perception that Federal government leader development programs do not sufficiently attend to EI as an integral part of building a leader's well-rounded competence.

Moreover, there is scarce qualitative information to explore in what ways EI, adult learning, and leadership development within the Federal government are integrated. With the prevalence of EI research being quantitative in nature (Nafukho, 2009), this study capitalized on suggestions for a qualitative, phenomenological methodology (Lincoln, 2009) in order to understand the essential EI-related experiences of Federal government officials who are already proven leaders. Similarly, Yukl (2010) advocated the use of qualitative research methodologies for studying leadership as a means "to explore different explanations of unfolding events" (p. 521). "A qualitative research approach might provide additional insight concerning how individuals conceptualize and classify developmental experiences ... in order to [analyze] experiences to determine where the most valuable learning occurred" (Bernthal et al., 2001, p. 507).

This phenomenological (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994) study sought to discover and understand the experiences of effective Federal government leaders in developing their emotional intelligence (EI). Those experiences involved an objective and subjective orientation, as well as idealism and realism perspectives (Moustakas, 1994). A phenomenological approach complements the research question (elucidated below), since a phenomenology asks: How did the experience of the phenomenon come to be what it is? (Moustakas, 1994).

To describe this phenomenon in a rich and descriptive manner, the following overarching

research question was posed: What are the experiences of effective Federal government leaders in developing their EI?

To explore the problem statement, the researcher used an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry. Several characteristics are common to all qualitative research and were of consequent importance in informing the questions:

- Data were collected in a natural setting;
- The researcher was a key instrument in collecting and analyzing the data;
- Multiple sources of data (e.g., interviews, observations, and documents) were used;
- Data analysis was inductive, building on patterns, categories, and themes;
- The focus was on the meaning that participants had about the problem;
- The research process was emergent;
- The researcher interpreted what was seen, heard, and understood; and
- The researcher attempted to provide a holistic account of the problem being studied (Creswell, 2007).

A qualitative research method was appropriate, given the researcher's epistemological assumption, constructivist worldview, research problem, and question.

Epistemology and Theoretical Perspectives

Epistemology

This study adopted a constructivist epistemological perspective. Constructivism is "where the interactive power of action and learning is realized through mental framing and its relevance to a particular context" (Yeo & Gold, 2012, p. 512). Constructivist approaches to emotion in learning challenge the paradigm of reason and scientific-based approaches to learning (Dirkx, 2008). These approaches are exhibited in learning oriented towards the participant, environment and action (Dirkx, 2008; Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). Accordingly, the researcher used semi-structured interviews as the vehicle for gathering data from the study participants, in order for the phenomenon to manifest as a meaningful experience (Moustakas, 1994).

Theoretical Perspective

Understanding and providing a "thick description" (Geertz, 1973, p. 27) is interesting, from the standpoint of introducing a changing phenomenon – how to develop leaders to be proficient not only in their cognitive and mission-oriented abilities, but also with an aptitude and

appetite for EI. This relates to the stabilization property of what constitutes interesting research (Davis, 1971), in that what appeared to be stable and unchanging vis-à-vis EI and leader development is actually unstable and dynamic. Another theoretical foundation explored is the paradigmatic orientation (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Kuhn, 1962) of leadership development and EI. Whereas, leadership development may have predominantly objective and functionalist properties, EI acknowledges “a different kind of intelligence” (Goleman, 1995, p. 36). At its core, EI represents a phenomenon that centers on how “individuals develop subjective meanings of their own experiences” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). The subjective experiential meaning is at the heart of a phenomenological study. In addition, transformative EI (Nelson & Low, 2004, 2011) is rooted in phenomenology (G. R. Low, personal communication, June 27, 2012).

Methodology

Moustakas (1994) noted that first-person accounts of the experiences drive evidence that emerges from phenomenological research. Phenomenology enables knowledge to emerge inductively. This study is grounded in the Moustakas (1994) transcendental phenomenological methodology which is a scientific, experiential-focused approach for seeking meaning, directing insight into experiences and obtaining knowledge through subjectivity, reflection, and thought. A phenomenological approach assigns experience and behavior as both intertwined with each other and as a bridge between a subjective and objective orientation. When reflecting, details of experiences are added and crystallized. Refinements to all facets of what occurred are induced. Critical to transcendental phenomenology is noema (what the subject experiences) and noesis (the way in which the experience is manifested through the subject's lens). The core tenets of this methodology are epoche, transcendental-phenomenological reduction, and imaginative variation. A brief description of each element follows.

Epoche

According to Moustakas (1994), epoche is a Greek word “meaning to refrain from judgment ... [and] requires a new way of looking at things” (p. 37). Epoche entails a bracketing of commonplace understandings and perceptions, in order to revisit phenomena in an invigorating and exploratory manner. Allowing a phenomenon or

experience to reveal itself in its purest form can be a challenging endeavor, but must be undertaken in order to allow requisite transparency and receptiveness into the subject's meaningful experience (Moustakas, 1994).

Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction (TPR)

Subsequent to epoche, each experience undergoes TPR by virtue of being considered in isolation, and on its own merits. Inherent to TPR is a thorough description replete with a recollection of the experience from myriad perspectives. Each of the three words – transcendental, phenomenological, and reduction – are accorded particular meaning by Schmitt (1967). As cited by Moustakas (1994):

It is called *transcendental* because it moves beyond the everyday to the pure ego in which everything is perceived freshly, as if for the first time. It is called *phenomenological* because it transforms the world into mere phenomena. It is called *reduction* because it leads us back to the source of the meaning and existence of the experienced world. (Schmitt, 1967, p. 61)

Imaginative Variation

Following TPR, imaginative variation grasps the experience's structural essence. “From this point a structural description of the essences of the experience is derived, presenting a picture of the conditions that precipitate an experience and connect with it” (Moustakas, 1994, pp. 39-40). The data of experiences represent the primary body of scientific investigation and resultant knowledge (Moustakas, 1994).

Theoretical Link with Constructs

Table 1 explains the association between the Moustakas (1994) transcendental phenomenological approach and the constructs used.

Data Collection

To achieve the research question, a purposeful selection strategy (Creswell, 2007; Maxwell, 2005) was used. This selective process bolstered the study's credibility (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Adapted from Maxwell (2005), there were four overarching goals for purposeful selection:

1. Deliberately select subjects who are known to be typical of the study purpose.

2. Adequately capture the heterogeneity (or diversity) of the population, in order to optimize variation.
3. Examine cases critical to the theoretical foundation of the research study.
4. Illuminate differences between settings or individuals.

Table 1

Construct & Variable Alignment with Transcendental Phenomenology

Construct/Variable	Alignment with Transcendental Phenomenology
Leadership	“Leadership is the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives” (Yukl, 2010, p. 8). Alignment: The process of achieving effective leadership outcomes requires the leader to connect with resonant experiences.
Leadership Development	Leadership development has unique attributes such as role modeling behavior, feedback, action learning (Marquardt, 2011), and experiential learning techniques (e.g., simulations, case studies) (Yukl, 2010). Alignment: Effective leader development techniques are experiential in nature and avail new essence for the leader.
Emotional Intelligence	A convergence of learned abilities that facilitate (a) the accurate knowledge and value of self, as well as responsible actions based on personal worth and dignity; (b) a variety of strong, healthy relationships; (c) the ability to work well with others; and (d) productive reactions to the demands and pressures of everyday life and work (Nelson & Low, 2011). Alignment: EI is inherently related to the subject’s recollection and meaning assigned to those experiences. Self-awareness utilizes transcendental properties of seeing experiences in a fresh perspective (Moustakas, 1994).
Adult Learning	Adults primarily learn through experiences and based on learning interventions that appeal to them (Merriam et al., 2007). Alignment: Adults learn primarily as a result of experiences.
Experiential Learning	Experiential learning is acquired knowledge of being through active participation (Heron, 2009) between the participant’s inner self and the environment (Beard & Wilson, 2006). Alignment: The inner self and environment parallel the subjective/objective environment innate to transcendental phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994).
Situated Learning	Situations increase learner cognizance of surroundings, social roles and expectations which, in turn, modify learning behaviors and attitudes (Merriam et al., 2007; Yeo & Gold, 2012). Alignment: Situated learning recognizes the social environment and a realism ontology, which is central to transcendental phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994).

The target audience for consideration in the current study was recipients of the Presidential Rank Award (PRA), which is bestowed annually

by the President of the United States. Only one percent of all Federal government executives are

conferred the highest PRA during their career (OPM, 2012).

PRA recipients role model effective leader (Yukl, 2010) characteristics. There are discernible correlations between award criteria and desirable EI attributes. Excerpts of the award criteria, provided on the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) website, are as follows:

The President [confers] the ranks of Distinguished Executive and Meritorious Executive on a select group of career members of the SES [Senior Executive Service] who have provided exceptional service to the American people over an extended period of time. These senior executives are outstanding leaders who consistently demonstrate strength, integrity, industry, and a relentless commitment to public service. *Through their personal conduct* and results-oriented leadership, they have earned and kept a high degree of public confidence and trust. The executive has also demonstrated the ability to *lead people effectively* by fostering employee development, *cooperation and teamwork*, and by *constructive resolution of conflicts* [emphases added]. (para. 1)

Stratified purposeful selection entailed administering a validated EI instrument to PRA recipients who, based on an announcement provided by the Senior Executive Association after informal written support was conveyed by an official from the Office of Personnel Management, contacted the researcher to express interest in participating. The purpose of using a validated instrument was to identify those who possessed high EI. The instrument used was a modified version of the Personal Excellence Map (PEM) (Hammett, Nelson & Low, 2011). As described in the *PEM Interpretation and Intervention Guide*, the PEM© is based on “30 years of research into how human cognition and emotion impact individual growth and performance” (Nelson et al., 2011). An on-line version of the modified PEM was used. The PEM is aligned theoretically with the subscribed Nelson and Low (2011) EI definition as well as the leadership elements within the Emotional Skills Assessment Process (ESAP, see Nelson & Low, 2011). The PEM is well suited for leader development (Hammett, 2007).

The data collection interview instrument was pilot tested with two subjects. As offered by Maxwell (2005), a benefit of pilot interviews is to help identify meanings that pilot participants may ascribe to the phenomena related to this study. Results of the pilot interviews affirmed the appropriateness of interview questions and were not used for any other purpose relating to this research.

A total of 21 PRA recipients expressed interest in participating in the study, by contacting the researcher, typically through email. Of the 21 who expressed interest, two were not pursued further since they had retired over 20 years ago. Of the remaining 19, 16 completed the on-line PEM survey (for a response rate of 84 percent). Of the 16 who completed the survey, the researcher selected 11 to be interviewed. The 11 who were selected had most of the top scores and all were within one standard deviation of the composite mean PEM score of 3.19. Those not interviewed were either outside the one standard deviation range or did not respond to requests to be interviewed. Also, the researcher wanted to keep a reasonable balance between those PRA recipients who are still actively employed in the Federal government (7 of the 11 interviewed) and those who recently retired (4 of the 11 interviewed). In addition to the actively employed: retired status, the researcher considered population diversity using the purposeful selection strategy (Maxwell, 2005) to mitigate a noticeable concentration of recipients from a single Federal government agency.

Given the target population, i.e., Federal government executives who likely have challenging jobs and competing demands on their time, a degree of attrition between (a) those with the highest scores and (b) those who are able and willing to be interviewed was expected. However, all Federal government executives who agreed to be interviewed maintained that commitment; no attrition occurred. Defining experiences were the focus of inquiry. Although the members of the targeted audience are now or were employed by the Federal government, the expanse of the participants' careers and adult lives were, at their discretion, revealed and considered by the researcher as relevant to the phenomenon investigated.

Data were collected through the use of semi-structured interviews designed to address the research question. Questions of an open-ended nature were formulated to align with the

conceptual framework and to enable emphasis on meaningful experiences (Creswell, 2007). Written research consent was obtained prior to commencing interviews. Using Creswell (2007) as a guide, in-depth interviews targeting duration of 60 minutes were conducted. Actual interview durations ranged from 40 to 78 minutes. Questions were provided to each participant via email at least one calendar day in advance of the scheduled interview, so as to promote the subject's reflection, which is vital to the transcendental phenomenology approach (Moustakas, 1994). Although the interview was a single episode, participants were provided the opportunity to reflect on the questions in advance. Moreover, the researcher offered participants with the opportunity to provide additional insights upon receipt of the interview transcript. (All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed by the researcher.) In totality, this process availed three distinct opportunities for participant reflection and sharing. Once the transcriptions were sent to participants for verification, the analysis process began.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Moustakas (1994) outlines the process of phenomenology in a way that seeks to describe, in rich detail, the experiences of individuals and then aggregates those individual descriptions into a composite description of how the phenomenon is experienced by the group of PRA recipients. In essence, the sequential Moustakas (1994) data analysis approach as furnished below was used.

1. Describe the essence of the experience, using epoche to isolate the subject's meaning.
2. Develop the significant statements, eliminating redundancies and vague statements that cannot be adequately described.
3. Develop clusters and themes by aggregating experiences.
4. Verify clusters and themes are congruent with interview transcripts.
5. Construct individual textural description of experience, using in vivo coding technique (this step aligns with Saldana, 2009).
6. Construct individual structural description of experience, based on the noesis (i.e., manifestation of the experience).
7. Construct for each research participant a textural-structural description. This captures a holistic, comprehensive account of the meaningful experience.

Following Moustakas (1994), data analysis began with transcribed interviews. Then,

significant statements "that provide and understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon" (p. 61) were analyzed horizontally, i.e., equal weight was given to all statements. The equal weighting is one example of exercising epoche, so as to suspend the researcher's judgments and biases. The remaining chronological steps noted above were employed, to complete the data analysis phase. The ultimate stage— a comprehensive portrayal of noesis and noema – the intentional experience in its entirety – availed the requisite understanding and discovery of the EI developmental phenomena in effective Federal government leaders. Specific coding techniques used are described below. Of notable import is that the researcher employed these steps in a recursive manner. Analysis and coding were interchangeable and incremental processes (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996) in order to yield a greater understanding of participant experiences.

Initial coding. As noted by Saldana (2009), this coding allows for the recording of initial categorization and has widespread application to many types of qualitative research. The researcher used initial coding in tandem with in vivo coding, described below.

In vivo coding. This coding is particularly conducive to acknowledging the voice of research participants (Saldana, 2009), a core underpinning for this study's phenomenological approach. Using direct quotes from participant aligned with discovering their experiences. It is worth noting that the direct quotes were not altered grammatically; the only changes made were the insertion of generic labeling to promote anonymity for the participants, other employees, and organizations.

Descriptive coding. Following the inaugural phase of initial and in vivo coding, descriptive codes were used. The descriptive codes were both theory-based (ETIC) and emergent (EMIC), the latter of which arising from an inductively analytical perspective (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). The descriptive codes attributed the experience's essence to a portion of text (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Saldana, 2009).

Counting. Frequency counts of the descriptive codes were calculated to promote analysis and help identify emergent themes and patterns (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Textual and structural descriptions. What was experienced (textual) and the meaning they

assigned to those experiences (structural) were described for each of the 11 participants interviewed (Moustakas, 1994).

Themes. Themes were derived by amalgamating textual and structural descriptions and by classifying primary themes into cohesive patterns (Saldana, 2009).

Patterns. The patterns configured from themes were used as the basis for discussing study conclusions as well as, implications for research, theory, and practice.

Verification procedures. Qualitative research depends on trustworthiness techniques in order to promote validity and mitigate researcher bias (Saldana, 2009). Techniques to ensure trustworthiness (termed validity by Maxwell in 2005) were congruent with the study's methodology, theoretical perspective, and epistemology. The particular trustworthiness techniques used included reflexivity, subjectivity statement, member checking, peer reviews, journaling and thick, rich descriptions of data collected.

- As defined by Creswell (2007), *reflexivity* "means that the writer is conscious of the biases, values, and experiences that he or she brings to a qualitative research study" (p. 243). To that end, the researcher endeavored to utilize reflexivity and epoche. The researcher promoted epoche by intentionally opting to transcribe the interviews himself. The iterative and sequential process of hearing the participants speak, writing notes during the interviews, listening to the digital recordings, transcribing the recordings, and seeing the transcribed results on the written page enabled the researcher to engage auditory and visual senses that, in turn, immersed the researcher further into the participant's meaning – and, by extension, further away from the researcher's bias.
- Both reflexivity (Day & Halpin, 2001) and *subjectivity statements* (Peshkin, 1988) were used to state explicit bias by the researcher as a professional within the leader development (and broader learning) community (Creswell, 2007). This researcher's subjectivity statement is that I have led and managed a number of leader development programs for the Federal government (and DoD in particular), that I do not believe that EI competence is attended to in an adequate manner within development programs, and that I find a leader's consequent

ability to constructively manage and harness emotions is appreciably diminished. The use of field notes and memos were key to capturing my reactions, in order to maximize the study's inductive orientation (Miles and Huberman, 1994), and to conduct due diligence with respect to any potential disconfirmations of researcher bias (Van de Ven, 2007).

- The use of *journaling* captured reactions to EI-related inquiries of particular sensitivity. Training on EI can surface emotional cues that interviews on the same subject may likewise trigger. Journaling revealed mental reminders, personal reactions, and clarifications to data quality (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The researcher employed journaling in a variety of ways, such as notes on the margins of transcripts.
- *Member checking* was used by the researcher in the final stage of the interviewing process described by Moustakas (1994). Seven of the 11 participants returned transcripts with minor clarifying edits, which the researcher incorporated. These revisions represented informant feedback (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Two more participants affirmed there were no changes. The remaining two participants did not respond to the member check request.
- To further mitigate inadvertent researcher bias, *peer reviews* of transcripts and emergent analyses and findings were conducted with doctoral candidate colleagues from the George Washington University on December 1 and 8, 2012. This process was valuable. One benefit of the peer review process was that personality was discussed in the interviews, but only by those who self-reported as being introverted in nature. The researcher is also an introvert. To further mitigate bias and optimize epoche, the researcher asked extroverted colleagues to participate in the peer review process. This tactic proved to be very useful, as it was the extroverts who pointed out the undercurrent of personality as being present in the transcript. The personality dimension may have been otherwise inadvertently overlooked or discounted.
- Finally, the nature of transcendental phenomenology inculcated a *rich description* (Creswell, 2007; Geertz, 1973; Moustakas, 1994) of the experience.

Although this study was not quantitative in nature, there is also a validity perspective for the PEM, which was used as the initial data collection instrument. The PEM has been validated as being statistically significantly related to all items on the scale; Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha for the PEM ranges from .63 (self-appreciation, not a primary focus of the study) to .90 (decision making, one of four leadership elements of the ESAP and which formed the basis for using the PEM). Other than self-appreciation, the Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha for all other scale items is at least .78 (Hammett, Nelson, & Low, 2011).

Findings

Emergent from this study were six themes, as described below.

Theme 1:

EI Experiences Manifest in Different Ways

Inductive analysis revealed a wide range of modalities in which EI experiences appeared, as expressed by the interviewed participants. Emotion, self-awareness, gender, personality, maturity, and storytelling are some of the manifestations. This theme's essence is that there is no uniform lens through which to view the maturation of EI over the course of one's career.

Theme 2:

EI Experiences are Socially Constructed

Inductive analysis revealed that EI experiences were viewed by participants as a social construction. Relating to and effectively dealing with others, connecting with people on an emotional level, mentoring, and family influence are representative social constructs. This theme's essence amplifies the interpersonal connection embedded in EI and in leadership. Being an effective leader encompasses having similarly effective relationship-building, connection, and sustainment skills.

Theme 3:

Culture Influences EI Experiences

Based on analyzing participant responses, culture was related to EI experiences. Organizational culture, occupations and certain defining moments represent some of the cultural portrayals. This theme's essence asserts that organizational culture and sub-culture phenomena can impact the presence and perseverance of EI. The degree to which leaders can leverage and

codify EI within a culture was challenging to varying degrees and surfaced in different ways.

Theme 4:

EI Experiences are Inherent for Effective Leadership

EI experiences are inextricably bound to leadership, according to participant accounts. Leadership, the ability to relate with others, maturity, integrity, and workplace pressures represent some of the participant experiences. This theme's essence relates to the association between EI and effective leadership. Participants viewed the two as inherently bound together, i.e., one cannot exist without the other.

Theme 5:

Developing EI is Dependent on Experiences

Experiential development is, based on an inductive analysis of participant responses, linked to EI. Developmental interventions (such as rotational assignments), defining experiential moments, and other participant perspectives emerged. This theme's essence drew on the broad expanse of experiences that shaped and built EI. Experiences were considered as learning in nature, even outside those a formal developmental program. Participants were apt to conclude that EI development emanated from a rich landscape of experiences.

Theme 6:

EI Experiences are Integrated with Other Aspects of Workplace and Personal Life

EI experiences are embedded with other aspects of professional and personal lives of the participants interviewed, based on their responses. All themes, but particularly theme 6, went well beyond the confines of the participant's Federal government careers per se. The participants threaded an association between events that occurred in their personal (non-work) lives and how that helped transform them into a more emotionally intelligent leader.

The six themes discussed above surfaced from reflecting the voice of participants and associating those voices with analytic codes. Reflection on the themes indicated that they were not mutually exclusive. This presented an opportunity to decide how to reconfigure the themes into synthesized patterns representing this study's overarching findings. Based on the researcher's

recursively reflective process, five of the six themes were realigned into three patterns, to represent the quintessential combination of experiences of effective Federal government leaders in developing their emotional intelligence. The construction of patterns resulting from previously established themes are annotated in Table 2.

Table 2
Themes related to patterns

Theme	Pattern
1. EI Experiences manifest in different ways. 6. EI experiences are integrated with other aspects of workplace and personal life.	DIVERSE FACTORS AFFECT EXPERIENCES
2. EI experience are socially constructed. 3. Culture influences EI experiences.	SOCIAL AND CULTURAL
5. Developing EI is dependent on experiences	EXPERIENTIAL DEVELOPMENT

Note: Theme 4 – EI experiences are inherent for effective leadership – is an overarching theme resonating across all others. As such, it is a stand-alone theme and further configuration into a pattern was unnecessary.

Implications

The recommendations for research and practice below focus on how the qualitative research orientation used in this study can help shape future exploration of EI and leadership.

Recommendations For Practice

1. *Importance of understanding how EI is developed within leaders.* In their transformative EI learning model, Nelson and Low (2011) identified social awareness, personal leadership, decision making, and empathy as crucial EI attributes for leaders to possess. The research findings appear to indicate that all four attributes are indeed important leadership skills. Where this study makes a contribution is in terms of not only identifying what needs to be developed, but how those skills are developed. For instance, the

mechanics for developing empathy and for inculcating emotional considerations towards productive decisions have not been widely researched. This study revealed that leaders connecting with people through a variety of challenges helps build empathy, and that actively building constructive alliances fosters positive decision making. Participants also identified factors such as gender, maturity, and personality (among others) that influence EI development. Perhaps, this study provides greater clarity towards understanding the association between EI and leadership, as offered in the discourse by Antonakis, Ashkanasy and Dasborough (2009). This study adds an incremental contribution to the empirical evidence on EI and the imperative for leaders to leverage EI, in order to achieve career success and personal excellence (Nelson & Low, 2011).

2. *Importance of qualitative research in studying EI.* Yukl (2010) acknowledged the benefits of qualitative research as regards leadership. Moreover, as Yukl (2012) stated:

To improve leadership theory and practice we need to know more about how much the [effective leadership] behaviors are used, when they are used, how well they are used, why they are used, who uses them, the context for their use, and joint effects on different outcomes (p. 75).

Underscoring this call issued by Yukl, no extant qualitative studies describing the experiences of effective leaders were found, in terms of how their EI was developed. This study contributes to that research gap: it is an opening salvo in exploring several of these tenants in a qualitative manner. As a result, this small yet novel contribution spotlights the potential value of qualitative research, and phenomenological studies in particular. Additional qualitative studies would fortify this scholarly discourse.

The contributions to practice described above can be consolidated into a suggested framework for developing EI within leaders. This framework includes and provides a recommended expansion of the Nelson and Low (2011) Emotional Learning System (ELS). The ELS is predominantly learner-focused and for good reason since many aspects of EI are inherently reflective in nature. As revealed in this study, however, EI has a multitude of experiential and social dynamics that should be considered when designing a learning and development curriculum.

For example, this study suggests that the ELS can be enhanced by learning with others as a complement to a self-directed learning focus. Developing the learned abilities of working well with others, building and sustaining healthy relationships, and reacting to workplace demands necessitate feedback mechanisms using a variety of modalities.

A holistic curriculum could be fashioned that starts with a fundamental understanding of EI and its relationship with effective leadership, followed by using the Nelson and Low (2011) ELS to accurately understand the self, then a series of activities in which EI manifests in social settings so that learners begin to appreciate the interpersonal dynamics of EI and, lastly, a series of activities aimed at sustaining and honing EI. The curriculum would advocate a temporal element: increasingly longer periods of time as one advances through the curriculum phases would be needed in order to embed previous learning and allow for reinforcement in the workplace environment. A longer window of time between the final two phases would allow for purposeful and incidental learning, both of which are arguably critical for EI to take root within a leader.

This suggested curriculum is depicted in Figure 1. The left side provides the sequential phases of learning; the right side provides terminal learning objectives and developmental implements for each phase.

Recommendations for Research

1. *EI research is needed at the organizational level of analysis.* The purpose of this study was

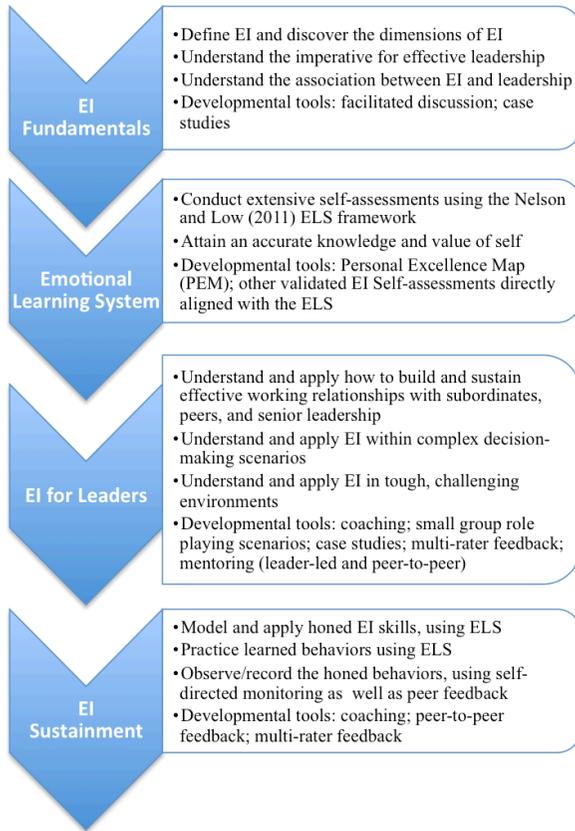


Figure 1. An EI-centric, research-based, holistic curriculum model for leadership development.

intentionally at the individual level of analysis, i.e., understanding the experiences of Federal government leaders in developing their emotional intelligence. Arguably, there is merit for a complementary research study on the impact of EI to the organization(s) being examined. There is likely alignment between the effectiveness of organization-level EI and how culture or sub-cultures are aligned within that organizational entity. A future research approach of this orientation could also consider EI vis-à-vis evolving

workplace dynamics, such as knowledge management and the role of EI in virtual, geographically-dispersed environs. Perhaps, a mixed-method approach of a longitudinal case

study combined with an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) quantitative methodology could be used. Monitoring EI changes over a period of time for individual leaders who remain within the same organization for the study's duration, coupled with ANCOVA studies measuring the impact of EI (and factors related to EI, as this study suggests) on those leaders' perceived effectiveness, may provide a novel research contribution. To the researcher's knowledge, mixed-method approaches exploring EI are thus far rare.

2. *Continued research (quantitative and qualitative) on EI and its impact.* One possible limitation of this study was that proven, successful, and award-winning senior Federal government leaders were asked for their perspectives on developing EI. This target population was intentionally chosen for the reasons described above, to include that many EI studies already published focused on students and specific occupations. It made sense to explore the study's phenomenon from a qualitative orientation, and to discover EI developmental experiences from leaders with proven, successful careers.

That stated, there remains ample opportunity to continue exploring the role of EI in the workplace. Future research purpose statements could, for example, focus on differences in validated EI assessment scores between executives, managers, first-line supervisors, non-supervisory employees, and blue collar workers. What accounts for those variances, and why? Does personality matter? Would extroverts, for example, see EI development from a perspective different than study participants who self-identified their introverted personality? Do those and other variances contribute towards a perceived healthy culture?

3. *Research the impact of EI's integration into leader development.* As described in the contributions to practice section, this study suggests one approach for integrating EI into leader development offerings. Figure 1 illustrated a recommended framework. Research should be undertaken to explore the extent to which engaging in this recommended development framework benefits the EI of leaders. This research would venture beyond measuring pre-and post-test scores taken before and immediately after a training course. Rather, such research would take multiple perspectives into account and encompass a more longitudinal orientation to

capture not only immediate but codified changes in a leader's behavior. Multi-rater feedback implements could be used. In so doing, it is plausible to submit that the return on value or expectation of the developmental offering could be linked to the future-oriented change impact of the leader, using a variety of assessment techniques.

Conclusion

The dissertation research study (Rude, 2013) that served as the basis for this article asked the question, What are the experiences of effective Federal government leaders in developing their emotional intelligence? Using a transcendental phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994) qualitative research approach, the researcher interviewed 11 award-winning Federal government executives to discern their essential, meaningful experiences that shaped their healthy EI (as gauged by their score using a validated EI instrument). The findings from those interviews, which were subjected to member checks, peer reviews, and recursive reflection, were surprising, refreshing, candid, and provided insights unique to the EI research domain. Perhaps, interest and insights gleaned from this study may fuel additional interest in qualitative research and how it can assist in a greater descriptive understanding of EI and its myriad relationships.

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