Strategic Emotional Intelligence:
Demystifying and Reconceptualising the EI-Leadership Link

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ABSTRACT

This paper advances theorisation of a new construct derived from the ability-based model of emotional intelligence: Strategic Emotional Intelligence (SEI). SEI is proposed as an alternative position to the recent debate concerning the altruistic versus manipulative use of EI by organisational leaders. Although this distinction is pertinent, I argue it reduces the value of EI to two polarised perspectives. First, a brief review of EI and its positive implications for leadership is provided. Second, rationales for the allegations made towards the potential “dark side” of EI are presented. Third, SEI is defined and issues that lie at its intersection with ethical leadership are acknowledged. The paper closes advocating the need for future leadership studies to formulate more assumption-challenging research questions.

Keywords: Emotional intelligence, strategy, critical perspectives on leadership, ethics, interpersonal behaviour
EMOTIONALLY INTELLIGENT LEADERSHIP

The Role of Emotional Intelligence in Leadership

Which emotional intelligence are we talking about?

The last seventeen years have witnessed a veritable explosion of interest in emotional intelligence (EI), particularly with regard to its relevance for the work domain. This is reflected in the fact that leading organisational behaviour (OB) textbooks (e.g., Robbins, 2005), international conferences (e.g., the International Congress of Emotional Intelligence, ICEI), large consulting firms (e.g., the Hay Group) and organisational issues-oriented articles published in peer-reviewed journals (e.g., Côté & Miners, 2006; Daus & Ashkanasy, 2005; Jordan, Ashkanasy, & Härtel, 2003) are increasingly devoting their attention to the topic. The level of interest is so high that it has even been asserted that EI has contributed to the emergence of an “affective revolution” (Barsade, Gibson, & Sparato, 2003; Barsade & Gibson, 2007) in the study of OB (Ashkanasy & Daus, 2005). But, what is EI exactly? As Caruso (2003) once declared “The answer, to a large extent, depends on who you ask” (p.1). Indeed, the field of EI today is replete with widely differing definitions and measurement methods. Consequently, it appears fundamental to clarify which definition of EI is adhered to in this paper prior to continuing the discussion.

For simplification, the different conceptual models that currently dominate the field can be categorised into two scientific approaches: the ability model and mixed/trait models\(^1\) (Brackett et al., in press; Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 2000).

Proponents of the ability model propose to view EI strictly as a mental ability, one that must be assessed by performance measures that exhibit incremental validity over and above personality traits and cognitive intelligence, and that meets traditional criteria for an intelligence. One instrument that has been demonstrated to achieve this is the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test\(^2\) (MSCEIT; Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2002) (Brackett & Mayer, 2003; Côté, Lopes, Salovey, & Miners, 2010; Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2002) (Brackett & Mayer, 2003; Côté, Lopes, Salovey, & Miners, 2010; Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2002) (Brackett & Mayer, 2003; Côté, Lopes, Salovey, & Miners, 2010; Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2002).

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\(^1\) For a more refined approach to distinguishing the different models and assessment tools of EI please refer to Ashkanasy and Daus’s (2005) “three streams” categorisation.

\(^2\) For a thorough description of the MSCEIT, including psychometrics, please see Rivers, Brackett, Salovey, and Mayer, (2007) and Mayer, Roberts, and Barsade (2008).
Caruso, & Salovey, 1999; Mayer, Salovey, Caruso, & Sitarenios, 2003; O’Boyle, Humphrey, Pollack, Hawver, & Story, 2010). The MSCEIT measures a set of four inter-related abilities (perceiving, using, understanding and managing emotions) that correspond to the first conceptualisation of EI to be introduced to the scientific literature (Salovey & Mayer, 1990) and to its revised version (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). One latest definition of EI by the authors of the ability model (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2008) is: “the ability to engage in sophisticated information processing about one’s own and others’ emotions and the ability to use this information as a guide to thinking and behaviour” (p. 503).

By way of contrast, mixed and trait models refer to conceptualisations of EI that surfaced through and post-popularisation of the construct. More precisely, the popularisation of EI saw the light of the day in 1995 with Goleman’s best-selling trade book “Emotional intelligence: Why it can Matter More than IQ.” The media, general public, practitioners and neophyte EI researchers were rapidly seduced by his rhetoric and the term catapulted to the forefront of the international scene.

Goleman (1995, 1998a, 1998b, 2000), however, has been criticised for making claims not founded in empirical research (Jordan, Ashton-James, & Ashkanasy, 2006; Lindebaum, 2009) and for metamorphosing EI’s original definition. For instance, he has gone so far as to equate EI with “character” (Goleman, 1995, p.285) and claimed that 90% of the variance between star and average leaders was attributable to the acquisition of advanced EI skills (Goleman, 1998b, 2000). Many EI experts (e.g., Jordan et al., 2006; Mayer et al., 2008) have deplored that such extravagant claims, combined with the cacophony of divergent views of EI, not only engendered confusion and controversy about the nature and predictive power of the construct but also served to feed the strident rhetoric of its most fervent detractors (e.g., Locke, 2005; Waterhouse, 2006).

Concerning mixed and trait models (e.g., Bar-On, 1997, 2006; Boyatzis & Sala, 2004; Petrides & Furnham, 2003; see Cherniss, 2010 for a review), three main concerns are often raised: (1) they define EI too broadly, i.e., as a mixture of emotion-related qualities (e.g., self-awareness, empathy), personality-type items and other dispositional attributes such as self-esteem, zeal, self-control, innovation, and assertiveness (Mayer et al., 2008); (2) their associated measurement methods are mostly self-report or
peer-report measures while these have been found to substantially overlap with existing personality measures (Brackett & Mayer, 2003; Brackett, Rivers, Shiffman, Lerner, & Salovey, 2006). Moreover, there is also evidence that self-report EI scales are vulnerable to respondents’ inaccurate judgments of their own abilities (Paulhus, Lysy, & Yik, 1998), as well as to social desirability biases and faking (Day & Carroll, 2008) notably for those low on job-relevant traits (Tett, Freund, Christiansen, Fox, & Coaster, 2012); (3) finally, although some of the scales associated with mixed/trait models do possess adequate reliability and factorial validity (Mayer, Roberts, & Barsade, 2008) and may be valuable tools for consultants (Daus & Ashkanasy, 2003), they do not measure EI as a mental ability. Thus, from a terminological point of view, it is difficult not to find problematic that a portion of these have included the term “emotional intelligence” in their appellation (e.g., “trait EI” measured by the TEIQue or Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire) or alternated its citation with other terms (e.g., “emotional competency” or “social intelligence”) that do not share the same meaning.

In light of the above considerations, and consistent with Daus and Ashkanasy (2003), I argue that Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso’s definitional approach to EI sets the “gold standard.” Accordingly, unless stated otherwise, the remainder of this paper focuses on EI as epitomised in the ability model. In the following section, I discuss the logic behind the utility of EI to the leadership field and succinctly review recent empirical research that supports it.

**Traditional emotional intelligence-leadership link**

Ground-breaking articles (e.g., Ashforth, & Humphrey, 1995; Pekrun & Frese, 1992; Weiss, & Cropanzano, 1996) on the importance of affect in the workplace have progressively created an opportunity for EI to become a recurrent topic in the scientific study of leadership. The notion that emotions are undesirable forces that prevent logical reasoning (e.g., Lefford, 1946; Young, 1943) which caused them to be neglected in organisational research for too long a time (Ashkanasy & Ashton-James, 2005; Briner, 1999) appears to have vanished. According to Ashkanasy and Daus (2002), for instance, being able to deal effectively with emotions and to create a positive emotional climate is the new challenge of the 21st
century manager, for which EI is required. In the same vein, Forgas and George (2001) argue that emotional abilities significantly influence the effective realisation of cognitively-based organisational tasks.

Table 1. Linking the four branches of EI to four key leadership process variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EI branch</th>
<th>Cognitive and emotional ability</th>
<th>Leadership process variable</th>
<th>Associated leadership capacity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perceive emotion</td>
<td>*Detecting and accurately identifying emotions in the self and in others</td>
<td>Motivate</td>
<td>Engaging well with followers by accurately assessing their authentic emotional states and motivations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>*Discriminating between the expression of authentic and inauthentic emotions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>*Expressing emotions appropriately</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use emotion</td>
<td>*Using emotions to redirect and prioritise thinking in productive ways</td>
<td>Influence</td>
<td>Giving purpose and utility to interactions with followers to produce desired outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>*Using emotions to facilitate judgment and memory</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understand emotion</td>
<td>*Labelling emotions accurately * Understanding complex emotions and simultaneous feelings</td>
<td>Guide</td>
<td>Facilitating interactions among employees by identifying roadblocks to successful working partnerships or job performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>*Recognising relationships associated with shift of emotion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manage emotion</td>
<td>*Staying open to feelings * Reasoning about emotions to develop appropriate emotional regulation strategies and promote intellectual growth</td>
<td>Empower</td>
<td>Maintaining interactions with and among followers by avoiding inappropriate and divisive responses to unpleasant emotions and encouraging and extending the experience of desired emotions to increase productivity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of course, as for the validity of EI itself, there are sceptics who have vividly criticised its relevance to leadership (see Antonakis, Ashkanasy, & Dasborough, 2009 for an interesting debate). Disagreements that persist among academics indicate that there may be many issues at the intersection of the two constructs that remained unresolved. The prevailing claim made by leadership scholars, however, is that EI constitutes a positive attribute for leadership. The logic behind this claim is several fold, the main ones being: (1) modern and popular conceptualisations of leadership (i.e., authentic leadership,
servant leadership, transformational leadership, see Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009 for a review) suit the EI paradigm, and (2) enough theoretical and empirical evidence has been produced to support the existence of what can be referred to as a EI-leadership link (Walter, Cole, & Humphrey, 2010).

A paradigmatic revolution has indeed occurred in the way leadership is conceptualised. Previous conceptions (e.g., contingency theories; Fiedler, 1967) that approached leadership in the context of person-situation fit have been recalibrated to embrace a new fit, person-person fit. Leadership seems to now be most commonly defined as a process of social interactions whereby the leader motivates, influences, guides, and empowers followers to successfully work towards the achievement of organisational goals (e.g., Bass & Riggio, 2006; George, 2000). This definition corresponds to the practice of transformational leadership (Bass, 1985). A conceptualisation of the relationship between the four branches of EI and the social objectives of higher-order leadership -- motivating, influencing, guiding, and empowering followers – can be found in Table 1.

Empirical evidence that EI facilitates transformational leadership exists (Leban & Zulauf, 2004), as well as positive associations with leadership effectiveness (Kerr, Garvin, Heaton, & Boyle, 2006; Rosete, 2007; Rosete & Ciarrochi, 2005) with correlations ranging from r=. 26 to r=. 52 (Brackett et al., in press). A recently completed meta-analysis of 48 studies (Mills, 2009) also supported the relationship between EI and leadership effectiveness. With the exception of Kerr et al (2006), the correlations reported remained statistically significant after partialling out cognitive ability and personality. Finally, additional research found that EI predicted leadership emergence in small groups after controlling for cognitive ability, personality, and gender (Côté et al., 2010). These findings led Walter et al. (2011), in the latest EI-leadership review, to distinguish three main links: EI and leadership emergence, EI and leadership behaviour (transformational behaviour) and EI and leadership effectiveness.

To sum up, evidence is accumulating that EI is, at least in some respect, a key contributor to the enhancement of the leadership function and a tool whose utilisation relates to positive, if not pure, behavioural characteristics. In opposition to this favourable portrayal, a new movement is emerging in the
EI literature suggesting EI may also have a “dark side” and may be used for manipulative or opportunistic purposes. The first theoretical and empirical analyses that have explored this provocative hypothesis are, respectively, convincing and intriguing. These are presented next.

**EMERGENCE OF THE DARK SIDE MOVEMENT**

**Demystification of the Purist View of Emotional Intelligence**

*First theorisations in favour of the dark side*

Early mentions that EI may facilitate emotional manipulation—albeit laconic—can be found. In their introductory article on the construct, Salovey and Mayer (1990) warned against ‘‘those whose skills are channelled antisocially’’ because they ‘‘may create manipulative scenes or lead others sociopathically to nefarious ends’’ (p. 198). In the same vein, Mayer (2001) acknowledged that ‘‘some emotionally intelligent people may manage their feelings in…negative ways: to manipulate, control, and exploit themselves and others’’ (p. 423). The conceivability of the existence of a “dark side” to EI, however, did not elicit intellectual rumination from the academic community and remained neglected at the time (see Ashkanasy & Tse, 2000; Dasborough & Ashkanasy, 2002; Emmerling & Goleman, 2003 for exceptions). A positioning of EI under the field of positive psychology was preferred (Salovey, Mayer, & Caruso, 2002) and prospered until very recently.

The first exhaustive account of EI as a mental ability that could be exploited strategically (i.e., in view of achieving egoistic aspirations) in an organisational context appeared two years ago (cf., Kilduff, Chiaburu, & Menges, 2010). Kilduff et al. made the critical observation that, so far, EI has been embellished in the OB literature in that research endeavours on the topic have disproportionately concentrated on desirable outcomes. They formalised a novel trajectory for the use of EI and demonstrated theoretically how the aggregation of the four branches that comprise EI could relate to dark side tactics. Specifically, the addition of the first two branches (perceiving and using emotions in the self and in

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3 Mixed model conceptualisation of EI.
others) was hypothesised to enable individuals to focus on strategically important targets. The subsequent addition of the last two branches (understanding and managing emotions in the self and in others), cumulated to the preceding one\(^4\), resulted in three other tactics: (1) disguising, expressing one’s own emotions for personal gain, (2) stirring and shaping others’ emotions through sensegiving, misattribution, and (3) strategic control of emotion-laden information. This re-theorisation of the use of EI is illustrated with concrete examples of CEOs of worldly known organisations (e.g., Salomon Brothers, Body Shop, Enron) who attempted to satisfy personal objectives and/or get ahead through unscrupulous methods that required EI skills.

The dark side perspective of EI in organisational settings finds additional theoretical support from many discussions that have drew attention to dysfunctional type of behaviours that may accompany the practice of leadership, and reciprocally. A copious lexicon of leadership theories have indeed also considered the dark side of leadership (Conger, 1990), where the leader prioritises self-serving goals (often obsessive and grandiose) through the use of emotional levers, often at the expense of both followers and organisational objectives. These theories include: inauthentic or pseudo-transformational leadership (Barling, Christie, & Turner, 2008; Bass, Avolio, & Atwater, 1996; Bass and Steidlmeier, 1999), unethical leadership (Brown & Mitchell, 2010) that may propagate through (negative) emotional contagion processes (Härtel & Panipucci, 2007), narcissistic leadership (Brunell et al., 2008; Higgs, 2009; Maccoby, 2000), and destructive leadership (Padilla, & Hogan, 2007). For a recent compilation of theoretical works on the dark side of leadership please see Schyns and Hansbrough’s (2010) edited book.

It seems that, similar to the intertwined paradigmatic revolution suggested earlier (recognition of the adaptive role of workplace emotions + modern conceptualisations of leadership), another intertwined paradigmatic revolution is emerging but in a virtually reversed fashion (dark side of EI + dark side of leadership). Empirically, this is exemplified by the remark that the first published dark side studies of EI have allocated their efforts to the exploration of its darkest side.

\(^4\) Note that this particular way of relating EI to the dark side tactics proposed here is due to the hierarchical theorisation of the four branches that compose EI.
First empirical research and findings

As research on the dark side of EI is at its infancy stage, empirical data available on the subject is limited. Since the dark side movement manifested, only two studies that used the ability model\(^5\) have been conducted (Austin, Farrelly, Black, & Moore, 2007; Côté, Decelles, McCarthy, Van Kleef, & Hideg, 2011). Both studies used student samples, consisted of two parts, but targeted a different application of EI and generated partially contradictory results. Austin et al.’s (2007) study (part 1 and part 2) was neutral in its targeting. The authors investigated the nature of the EI-Machiavellianism relationship and found a negative correlation between the two constructs. This reassured the prevailing view that EI is better theorised as a construct that advances the common good (Walter et al., 2011). Côté et al.’s (2011) study, on the other hand, was essentially workplace-oriented. Part 1 focused on the positive side of EI. Emotion-regulation knowledge (i.e., 4\(^{th}\) branch in Mayer and Salovey’s model, cf. table 1) was weighted against moral identity and prosocial behaviour. Among individuals with higher emotion regulation knowledge, moral identity exhibited a stronger positive association with prosocial behaviour in a social dilemma. Part 2 sought to research the dark side of EI and analysed the interaction of EI with Machiavellianism and interpersonal deviance at work. Results reported that among the same statistical population as that of part 1, Machiavellianism exhibited a stronger positive association with interpersonal deviance. These intriguing results provided the first empirical evidence that EI may have both a positive and a dark side.

Additional research on the potential dark side of EI can be found elsewhere (see Grieve & Mahar, 2010; Pham, Ducro, & Luminet, 2010; Porter, ten Brinke, Baker, & Wallace, 2011). These studies have also reported intriguing findings. Note, however, that all of them used self-report measures based on mixed or trait models of EI. As previously explained, definitions of EI associated with these assessment methods are in stark contrast to the one adopted in this paper. Trying to make sense of their results here would therefore be an incoherent and futile exercise. Besides, the aforementioned studies have been

\(^5\) Note that Austin et al. (2007) used both self-report and performance measures of EI in their study.
exclusively concerned about examining whether (their version of) EI and psychopathy could positively
correlate, which limits their relevance to the realm of clinical and personality pathology.

The dark side movement seems to be progressively gaining momentum with researchers in this
area deepening their criticism about the over-accentuated positive rendering of EI. Today, the impact of
the movement is such that it has started to divert attention from the definitional and measurement issues
that have arisen around different conceptions of EI to questions that place EI at the heart of an interesting
but Manichean debate between an altruistic versus manipulative use of EI.

THE CASE FOR STRATEGIC EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Problematizing the Current Emotional Intelligence Debate

 Limitations of the polarisation of the EI construct

 In line with Gardner’s (1999) assertion that “No intelligence is moral or immoral in itself” (p.10),
I regard both views presented above about the way EI may be utilised by organisational leaders as equally
but moderately (cf. comments below) pertinent. Given the amount of supporting evidence, the beneficial
contribution of EI to leadership is hard to refute. Alternatively, concerns over the possible manipulative
use of EI seem plausible. They are also valuable in that they permit scholarly deliberation, which in turn
permits the elaboration of actions that aim at responding to issues that are being detected as new
knowledge is acquired. For example, if additional research finds EI promotes unethical leadership
behaviour, as Walter et al. (2011) pointed out, this would imply that “significant alterations to
organisations’ EI development activities” (p.54) would be necessary.

 In this section, however, I argue that the intellectualisation of the “debate” with respect to the use
of EI, as it is now, is limited. I find particularly frustrating that dark side researchers automatically link the
act of opportunistically capitalising on EI to achieve self-interested goals with Machiavellianism⁶. While it

⁶ Note the use of the term “immediately” in Austin et al.’s (2007) comment: “Considering the possibility that
individuals might have a dispositional tendency to emotionally- manipulative behaviour immediately brings to mind
the trait of Machiavellianism” (p.180).
may be the case for certain leaders, this perspective is stigmatising the portion of leaders that may engage in emotional manipulation but not to the extreme degree of putting others’ well-being in peril. What is more, it is worth noting that Machiavelli’s initial thoughts are subject to competing interpretations. It has been suggested that typical evaluations of Machiavelli’s doctrine (e.g., the idea that he extols the virtues of malicious behaviours without attributing the least importance to their impact on others) may result from a fantasied reading of his writings (Parkinson, 1955). Similar critiques apply about the positive EI-leadership link. Only behaviours that are visibly discernable as being ethical and leading to beneficial outcomes are reported, but that does not prevent them from being potentially performed to satisfy “impure” intentions. After all, justifications for the organisational application of EI do not allude to neutral motives. Economical terms such as “financial performance”, “productivity” (Caruso & Wolfe, 2004), and “competitive advantage” (Jordan, 2005) often accompany EI.

I posit that the treatment of the question of the use of EI would offer more subtle insights into the EI-leadership link if problematised. Problematisation is a metholodogical approach advanced by Alvesson and Sandberg (2011) that entails challenging assumptions that underlie existing literature. The authors speculate that this approach augments the probability of constructing interesting research questions that lead to the development of influential theories. I subscribe to this position. Another position to which I subscribe is that of pre-Socratic Greek philosopher Heraclitus (535-475 BC). According to Heraclitian thought, the act of polarising is naive and unsophisticated as it imposes a deterministic conception of life. Things that are traditionally polarised (e.g., good versus evil) are perceived as being inexorably linked, unified, and incapable of being cleanly divorced (Khan, 1981).

The leadership style of Steve Jobs, iconic former Apple CEO, is a good example of Heraclitus’s philosophy. Jobs’s transformational skills for articulating a vision that inspires and motivates his employees’ inventiveness is widely recognised. Apple’s $600 billion market capitalisation (Goldman & Cowley, 2012), largely achieved under his leadership, provides testimony for his ability to infuse followers with creativity and commitment about work. Anecdotally, Jobs has been the recipient of numerous honours, including “CEO of the Decade” by Fortune Magazine and “Person of the Decade” by
Time Magazine (Beahm, 2011). On the other hand, his visionary excellence has been reported to oscillate with self-absorbed, tyrannical and destructive leadership (Westley & Mintzberg, 1989) often camouflaged by the use of impression management techniques (Harvey, 2001). One Apple engineer said about Jobs, “the little things he did would create incredible pressure unlike I’d ever experienced before just tearing you to the bone ripping you apart and making you feel worthless” (as cited in Harvey, 2001, p.263). Which box would Jobs be put into? Surely, he cannot be cut in half.

Kilduff et al.’s (2010) strategic approach to the “debate” sets an appropriate theoretical platform to advance a problematised analysis of the use of EI.

**Defining strategic emotional intelligence (SEI)**

Inspired from Kilduff et al.’s (2010) ground-breaking article, but making one slight amendment to their theorising of SEI with the removal of the Machiavellian connotation “at the expense of others” (p.129), I propose a first formal definition for SEI: the automatic or deliberate use of EI by an individual in an attempt to respond to a pressure or satisfy a desire that is directly linked to the accomplishment of a personal goal. Thus SEI neither excludes nor necessarily includes manipulation of others, rather it denotes personal goal pursuit.

This definition does not endorse a Machiavellian practice of leadership. Instead, it is based on the assumption that the position of leader is a distinctively singular and unique position to occupy, one that is hard to attain and maintain, especially in today’s highly competitive and volatile business environment. SEI intends to normalise leaders’ desires/temptations for getting ahead by appreciating that with leadership comes power, status, ambitions, prestige, competition, and pressure to perform. I hypothesise that SEI provides a more realistic depiction of leaders’ motivations for using EI. The next paragraphs elaborate further why SEI is essentially a pragmatic construct.
Leaders’ (Genuine) Motivations for Engaging in EI: Questions never asked

Modern conceptualisations of leadership, I argue, only offer a partially accurate estimation of leaders’ motivations for engaging in EI. In fact, theory aside, very little is known about the factors that truly drive leaders’ behaviours. Personal goals such as gaining public recognition, earning more money or getting promoted may justify a significant amount of leaders’ efforts for motivating, influencing, guiding, and empowering others. This possibility, however, has yet not been acknowledged in the current EI-leadership literature. Personal goals in leadership are generally deemed as morally intolerable by making repugnant the notion of ambitiousness. In ignoring these issues or relegating their treatment to dark-side oriented research, the EI-leadership literature, quite regrettably, is cultivating the myth of what Vroom and Jago (2007) refer to as the heroic conception of leadership.

Contrary to Christie and Geis (1970) who confessed to have a perverse admiration for those super gifted in the art of manipulation, I join those who excoriate Machiavellianism. I am nevertheless dubitative regarding the abundance of claims that put leaders, who in appearance may qualify as authentic (e.g., Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, & Peterson, 2008), on a pedestal. Of course, exceptions do exist, they always do. Indian tycoon Ratan Tata, for instance, built a business empire out of placing ethical corporate and personal conduct as the golden rule to adhere to (cf. Tata Code of Conduct (TCoC)”, one for which he prides himself to be “ferociously fighting for” (CNN-IBN, 2007). But, how many Ratan Tatas are there really out there?

As previously asserted (cf. Jordan, Dasborough, & Daus, 2010; Vroom & Jago, 2007), the situational context plays a major role in shaping leaders’ behaviours. As I envisage it, SEI comes into play when the situational context is favourable to the realisation of a personal goal. SEI seeks to reconcile the two contrasting positions discussed earlier with regard to the use of EI. It supports a modern view of EI that, up to now, has been neglected. I sympathise with academics’ pressure to publish and to comply with

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Note that, in some instances, leaders’ personal goals can be aligned or coincide with organisational goals, whether premeditated or not (e.g., a leader’s personal goal to gain public recognition may align with an organisation’s goal to boost its reputation).
politics that surrounds the reviewing process (see Ashkanasy, 2010, 2011; Sandberg & Alvesson, 2011 for supporting arguments). Still, I believe that we should not succumb to the pressure and be reticent to address controversial questions such as the ones presented in this paper. Such attitude represents a colossal obstacle that prevents most innovative research to flourish (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2012). The claim that SEI exists, however, imposes the ultimate effort of demonstrating the validity of the construct.

Validating Strategic Emotional Intelligence

Clearly, validating SEI is one important challenge that lies ahead. Superior methodological rigour to the methods used in previous investigations of EI is needed. Experimental and longitudinal studies, in particular, are lacking and would enrich our current understanding of EI in so that they would permit researchers to prove causality. I recommend future studies not to use student samples but “real” organisational leaders to increase the ecological validity of the data obtained (Peterson, 2001) and respond to the call for producing research that is relevant to issues that practitioners are facing (Mohrman & Lawler III, 2012). Another recommendation is to incorporate political skills (Ferris et al., 2005) to the list of variables being tested, as well as to control for Machiavellianism, cognitive ability and personality. In particular, neglect in controlling for these last two variables has been an often-cited critique in EI research (Côté et al., 2010; Walter et al., 2011).

Perhaps one of most exciting questions to explore would be: how often are high-SEI leaders successful in their attempt to achieve their personal goal? The practice of SEI also raises a myriad of issues that lie at the intersection of EI and ethical leadership. Unlike Brown and Treviño (2006), I do not feel that the study of normative ethics has been sufficiently applied in leadership studies. Using Kantianism, Utilitarianism, and Ethical Egoism (Beauchamp, Bowie, & Arnorld, 2008) to explore the aforementioned issues would be an interesting option to pursue, as each doctrine would produce a different reasoning about the morality of SEI. In addition, recent theoretical work about the role of affect and interactional justice in moral leadership (Härtel & Ganegoda, 2008) as well as ways to prevent
leaders’ unethical use of SEI (cf. NORMS, Bausseron in Mikolajczak & Bausseron, in press) is available and could provide a suitable basis to reflect on the “debate.”

**CONCLUDING REMARKS**

Two dominant views about the way leaders may use EI (altruistically vs. manipulatively) have been considered so far in the relevant literature and briefly described in this paper. In formalising the first definition for SEI, the strategic use of EI in view of achieving personal goals, I propose an alternative way of exploring the potential “dark side” of EI. Arguments that support the plausibility of the existence of the construct have been presented, and ethical considerations acknowledged. SEI does not pretend to reinvent the EI-leadership field, but to accelerate its development. I concur with Ashkanasy and Dasborough’s (in Antonakis et al., 2009) assertion that research on the EI-leadership link is better served with the adoption of a Popperian approach to advancing knowledge, i.e., one that is open to new ideas and theories. SEI, I believe, opens new areas for research that fits into that category.

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