

Abstract

Research indicates that emotional intelligence is more important than cognitive intelligence among successful leaders of organizations. Recognizing and developing one's emotional intelligence is an important factor for effective leadership across sectors. Leaders can increase their emotional intelligence competencies through awareness and practice.

The purpose of this study was to assess the emotional competence of first-year school leaders (assistant principals and principals). Participants were eighteen first-year school leaders in Delaware in the 2019-2020 school year. Each leader consented to participate and completed an online instrument, the Emotional Intelligence Appraisal®. The appraisal generated a report for each participant, identifying individual emotional intelligence competencies. Some participants also engaged in a follow-up interview to reflect on their emotional intelligence competencies, including their identified strengths and recommended areas for growth. Interviewees additionally reflected on subsequent professional learning plans for their leadership growth, based on their Emotional Intelligence Appraisal® report. The researcher examined quantitative and qualitative data collected through this process to assess the emotional intelligence of participants and summarize participant reflections on their Emotional Intelligence Appraisal® report. Results of this study provide important implications for school leader preparation and induction and may identify strategies for retaining leaders and teachers, and influencing student learning.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to assess the emotional competence of first-year principals and assistant principals. Participants reflected on their strengths, challenges, and subsequent, personalized professional learning plans for their leadership growth.

The following research questions guided this research study:

1. Which emotional competencies do first-year principals and assistant principals consider their greatest strengths?
2. Which emotional competencies do first-year principals and assistant principals consider their greatest areas for growth?
3. How do first-year principals and assistant principals plan to use their emotional competency indices to facilitate their professional learning?

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Method

This was a mixed- methods study. Quantitative data were collected using the Emotional Intelligence Appraisal, a self-reported survey instrument by TalentSmart®. The instrument's rating scale indicates scores in terms of strengths or areas for growth for each competency and skill score.

Descriptive statistics were utilized to analyze the emotional intelligence competencies and skills of participants.

Qualitative data were collected through the implementation of an interview protocol with some survey respondents. The interview protocol was developed by the researcher. Interview participants reflected on their emotional competencies and skills in terms of their greatest areas of strength and areas for growth as measured by the Emotional Intelligence Appraisal. They also reported how they plan to use their emotional competency index to promote their professional learning, if at all. Survey data were compared to interview responses to investigate the relationship between knowledge of emotional intelligence competencies and skills and any existing plans to use the knowledge for personal development.

Team

Alison Travers, Ed.D. is a leadership associate in the Delaware Academy for School Leadership. She has served in multiple roles at DASL since 2008. She is the Program Manager for the University of Delaware "PPP" Principal Preparation Program, an approved principal certification program in the State of Delaware. Since 2015, the program has prepared 60+ certified school leaders in Delaware under her leadership. She is also the coordinator of DASL's national leadership partnership with the National Association of Secondary School Principals and the School Superintendents Association (AASA). Alison manages DASL's 21st Century Community Learning extra time programs in elementary and middle schools in the State of Delaware. Alison completed her doctoral studies in K-12 Educational Leadership. Her doctoral research focused on support for novice school leaders and the development of their emotional intelligence to foster effective, positive leadership. She also holds a Masters' degree in Public Administration and organizational leadership, and a Bachelor's degree in Psychology and History.

Results

Quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed to answer each research question.

The study's first research question asked, "Which emotional competencies do first-year principals and assistant principals consider their greatest strengths?" Analysis of the frequency of participant score ranges indicates that within the 80-100 range of scores, at least eight of 17 participants have one or more skills identified as a strength for their leadership effectiveness. Self-awareness was rated highest, with eight participants rated 80 or above in this EQ skill. Subsequent participant interviews revealed that the perceptions of first-year school leaders indicate their greatest strengths vary across the emotional competencies and skills. At least one individual of the eight interviewed indicated that their greatest strength lies in each of the four emotional intelligence skills (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management).

The second research question asked, "Which emotional competencies do first-year principals and assistant principals consider their greatest areas for growth?" Analysis of the frequency of participant score ranges indicates that within the 60-79 range of scores, self-management and social awareness rated in this range most frequently, as 12 of 17 appraisal participants received ratings between 60-79 on these two emotional intelligence skills. Additionally, 11 participants received ratings between 60-79 in relationship management. Each of these skills represents an area for growth among participants in this study.

Interviews revealed that the greatest area for growth, according to participants, was self-management. Five of the eight first-year principals and assistant principals interviewed cited self-management as their greatest area for growth.

Research question three asked, "How do first-year principals and assistant principals plan to use their emotional competency indices to facilitate their professional learning?" Interview participants ($n = 8$) reflected on their plans for their professional learning. First-year school leaders in this study were reflective of the fact that they are in a learning season, and expressed that there are multiple opportunities for novice school leader induction and professional learning in the State of Delaware. Most participants noted that their professional learning in their first year(s) on the job would focus on the duties of their current job role, and the mandated professional development of their district or the state, and will not necessarily focus on developing their emotional competencies as recommended by the Emotional Intelligence Appraisal.

Conclusions

It is possible to measure emotional intelligence (EQ) just like a cognitive intelligence quotient (IQ), and one's score can increase with effort (Goleman, 1998). The role of a school leader is challenging and, to lead effectively, the leader needs awareness of, and the ability to regulate one's emotions and responses. The results of this study offer important implications for school leader preparation and induction and may identify strategies for retaining leaders and teachers and influencing student learning.

The results of this study indicate that participants all identify areas of strength and areas for growth related to their emotional intelligence. Overall, participants reviewed their Emotional Intelligence Appraisal report and acknowledged the highest score or scores in their report as their greatest emotional competency strengths. Most (seven) participants agreed with the appraisal's rating of their strongest emotional intelligence competency. These individuals cited their top-scoring emotional competencies and skills according to the appraisal report when reflecting on their greatest strengths, and their lower-scoring competencies and skills when reflecting on their greatest areas for growth. In addition to identified areas of strength and areas for growth, each participant received recommended strategies for personal development of their areas for growth. Most participants did not commit to immediate action on these recommended strategies; their professional development plans do not currently focus on developing their emotional intelligence competencies and skills.

The adults leading the social-emotional learning of students must master their social-emotional capacities, and the study of the emotional competence of school leaders must continue. If school leadership preparation and induction programs remain oblivious of the real impact of the emotional competence and skills novice leaders possess and employ, the result will be a field of underprepared leaders who are not equipped to manage themselves or others at a level of effectiveness.

References

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