
Intelligenza emotiva

Una chiave per la Human Capital Sustainability Leadership oltre i tratti di personalità

Annamaria Di Fabio¹ e Andrea Svicher²

Sommario

L'attuale crisi economica minaccia la qualità della vita lavorativa. In questo scenario, in accordo con i *sustainable development goals* delle Nazioni Unite, la questione della sostenibilità e dello sviluppo sostenibile è diventata urgente anche per le risorse umane nelle organizzazioni. Il presente studio si propone di esaminare le relazioni tra *trait Emotional Intelligence (EI)* e *Human Capital Sustainability Leadership (HCSL)*, controllando per i tratti di personalità. A Centosessantasette lavoratori italiani sono stati somministrati il *Big Five Questionnaire*, il *Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire Short*, la *Human Capital Sustainability Leadership Scale*. I risultati mostrano che la *trait EI* aggiunge una percentuale di varianza incrementale oltre i tratti di personalità in relazione alla HCSL. La *Trait EI* potrebbe rappresentare una promettente risorsa per la HCSL in *strength-based prevention perspectives per healthy organizations*.

Parole chiave

Intelligenza emotiva, *Human capital sustainability leadership*, Tratti di personalità, sostenibilità, *Healthy organizations*, *Strength-based prevention perspectives*.

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Emotional intelligence

A key for Human Capital Sustainability Leadership beyond personality traits

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Abstract

The current economic crisis threatens the quality of working life. In this scenario, according to the sustainable development goals of the United Nations, the issues of sustainability and sustainable development have become urgent also for human resources in organizations. The present study aims to examine the relationships between trait *Emotional Intelligence* (EI) and *Human Capital Sustainability Leadership* (HCSL), controlling for personality traits. One hundred and sixty-seven Italian workers were administered the *Big Five Questionnaire*, the *Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire Short* and the *Human Capital Sustainability Leadership Scale*. Results showed that trait EI added a percentage of incremental variance beyond personality traits in relation to HCSL. Trait EI could be a promising resource for HCSL in strength-based prevention perspectives for healthy organizations.

Keywords

Emotional intelligence, Human capital sustainability leadership, Personality traits, Sustainability, Healthy organizations, Strength-based prevention perspectives.

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Introduction

The recent economic crisis and the new global economies that characterize the 21st century threaten the quality of working life (Blustein, Kenny, Di Fabio, & Guichard, 2019; Di Fabio & Kenny, 2016b; Peiró, Sora, & Caballer, 2012). For this reason, issues of sustainability, sustainable development, and the sustainable well-being of workers have become more urgent (Di Fabio, 2017a; Peiró, Ayala, Tordera, Lorente & Rodríguez, 2014).

In this scenario, it is essential to consider new forms of leadership that are capable of promoting organizational sustainability (Di Fabio & Peiró, 2018). Human Capital Sustainability Leadership (HCSL; Di Fabio & Peiró, 2018) is one possible answer since it enables the development of sustainable human resources to be promoted. HCSL (Di Fabio & Peiró, 2018) is a current construct developed within the research area of the psychology of sustainability and sustainable development (Di Fabio, 2017b; Di Fabio & Rosen, 2018). This research area contributes to the transdisciplinarity of sustainability science (Dincer & Rosen, 2013; Rosen, 2009), introducing the psychological perspective as a way of understanding the processes linked to sustainability and sustainable development (Di Fabio & Rosen, 2018).

Human capital sustainability leadership refers to the flourishing of employees and work environments, taking into account the realm of psychology of sustainability and sustainable development in order to acquire healthy individuals in healthy organizations (Di Fabio & Peiró, 2018). It is a higher-order construct which includes four specific kinds of leadership (ethical, sustainable, mindful and servant). Ethical leadership deals with yielding fair and equitable objectives, empowering employees, creating a profound link between actions and adopted values, and using behaviour to disseminate or reinforce ethical standards, equitable agreement, rewards, kindness, compassion and consideration for others (Di Fabio & Peiró, 2018). Sustainable leadership is aimed at building and maintaining an enduring learning process, ensuring continuative progress, sustaining the leadership capacity of others, taking care of social justice issues, re-generating rather than diminishing organizational resources, improving heterogeneity and environmental capacity, and being actively involved in the safeguarding of the environment (Di Fabio & Peiró, 2018). Mindful leadership is a style built on being aware of the present moment and detecting internal emotional states and sensations in order to bring them under control, particularly during stressful challenges. Moreover, it encompasses being aware of the individual's own presence at any given time, also taking into consideration its impact on followers (Di Fabio & Peiró, 2018). Servant leadership consists in facilitating the rise of the personal interests of followers (not for the organization or leader's interests), listening to their needs and assisting them via the support of ethical responsibility towards them (Di Fabio & Peiró, 2018).

The psychology of sustainability and the sustainable development framework (Di Fabio, 2017a, 2017b; Di Fabio & Rosen, 2018) sustains strength-based prevention perspectives (Di Fabio & Saklofske, 2021) and also a primary prevention perspective (Di Fabio & Kenny, 2015, 2016a; Hage et al., 2007), underlining the value of identifying and fostering individual strengths. In organizational contexts, these perspectives highlight the relevance of increasing workers' strengths through early intervention to enhance variables amenable to training (Di Fabio & Saklofske, 2011) in order to promote healthy organizations (Di Fabio, Cheung, & Peiró, 2000).

In this framework, Emotional Intelligence (EI) represents a promising resource since it can be increased through specific training (Di Fabio & Kenny, 2011), differently from personality traits, which are fundamentally stable (Costa & McCrae, 1992).

In current literature, two approaches relative to EI emerge (Stough, Saklofske, & Parker, 2009), namely ability-based models (Mayer & Salovey, 1997) and trait EI models (self-reported emotional intelligence, Bar-On, 1997; trait emotional self-efficacy, Petrides & Furnham, 2001). Ability-based models (Mayer & Salovey, 1997) are relative to emotional intelligence abilities whereas trait EI models refer to perception of emotional intelligence (Bar-On, 1997; Petrides & Furnham, 2001). In the current study, the trait EI model by Petrides and Furnham (2001) was used because it is a more comprehensive model compared to Bar-On's (1997) model, considering also expression of emotions, regulation of emotions, and self-motivation aspects.

Literature has reported a number of studies examining associations between trait EI and various leadership styles, showing findings on the contribution of EI on leadership styles (Barling, Slater, & Kelloway, 2000; Kotzé & Nel, 2015; Mandell & Pherwani, 2003; Siegling, Nielsen, & Petrides, 2014). However, to our knowledge, trait EI has not been studied in relation to the current construct of HCSL (Di Fabio & Peiró, 2018) yet. For this reason, studies to explore relationships between trait EI and HCSL are needed.

Therefore, the aim of the present study is to analyse the relationships between trait EI and HCSL, controlling for personality traits. The specific hypotheses are as follows:

- H1: A positive relationship will emerge between trait EI and HCSL;
- H2: Trait EI will add a percentage of incremental variance with respect to the variance explained by personality traits in relation to HCSL.

Method

Participants

The participants were 167 workers from the region of Tuscany (males = 61.08%, females = 38.92%; mean age = 38.93 years, $SD = 10.91$).

Measures

The *Big Five Questionnaire* (BFQ; Caprara, Barbaranelli, & Borgogni, 1993): 132 items on a scale from 1 = «Absolutely false» to 5 = «Absolutely true»; Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients: .81 Extraversion, .73 Agreeableness, .81 Conscientiousness, .90 Emotional stability, .75 Openness.

The *Trait Emotion Intelligence Questionnaire Short Form* (TEIQue-SF; Petrides, 2009; Italian version Di Fabio & Palazzeschi, 2011): 30 items on a scale from 1 «Completely disagree» to 7 = «Completely agree»; Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients: .82 for Well-being dimension, .80 for Self-control dimension, .81 for Emotionality dimension, .82 for Sociability dimensions, .81 for the total score.

The *Human Capital Sustainability Leadership Scale* (HCSLS; Di Fabio & Peiró, 2018): 16 items on a scale from 1 = «None» to 5 = «Very much»; Cronbach's alpha of the HCSLS: .94.

Procedure

The questionnaires were administered in groups by trained psychologists. The order of administration was counterbalanced in order to limit the potential effects of a set presentation of the instruments. The instruments were administered according to the requirements of Italian laws of privacy and informed consent.

Data Analysis

The data analyses carried out through SPSS 25 comprised descriptive statistics, Pearson's r correlations and hierarchical regressions.

Results

Table 1 shows zero-order correlation among the BFQ, TEIQue-SF and HCSLS.

Table 1

Correlations among the BFQ, TEIQue-SF and HCSSL.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. BFQ Extraversion	-									
2. BFQ Agreeableness	.02	-								
3. BFQ Conscientiousness	.39**	.08	-							
4. BFQ Emotional stability	.04	.33**	.15*	-						
5. BFQ Openness	.40**	.39**	.30**	.46**	-					
6. TEIQue-SF Well-being	.16*	.23**	.32**	.26**	.46**	-				
7. TEIQue-SF Self-control	.29**	.24**	.33**	.44**	.42**	.48**	-			
8. TEIQue-SF Emotionality	.19*	.43**	.20*	.28**	.42**	.49**	.46**	-		
9. TEIQue-SF Sociability	.45**	.14	.36**	.19*	.21**	.44**	.49**	.36**	-	
10. HCSSL	.08	.31**	.20*	.13	.16*	.44**	.16*	.26**	.25**	-

Note. $N = 167$. * $< .05$, ** $< .01$.

BFQ = *Big Five Questionnaire*; TEIQue-SF = *Trait Emotion Intelligence Questionnaire Short Form*; HCSSL = *Human Capital Sustainability Leadership Scale*.

Table 2 shows results of the hierarchical regression performed with HCSSL as a dependent variable. Personality traits (BFQ) were inserted as an independent variable at step 1 and TEIQue-SF dimensions were inserted as an independent variable at step 2. Personality traits explain 14% of the variance (first step) whereas the TEIQue-SF dimensions added 20% of the variance (second step); the total R^2 of the model was .34.

Table 2

Hierarchical regression: contribution of personality traits (BFQ) and trait EI (TEIQue-SF) in relation to Human Capital Sustainability Leadership.

	HCSLS
	β
<i>Step 1</i>	
BFQ Extraversion	.01
BFQ Agreeableness	.24**
BFQ Conscientiousness	.15*
BFQ Emotional stability	.07
BFQ Openness	.09
<i>Step 2</i>	
TEIQue-SF Well-being	.42**
TEIQue-SF Self-control	.14*
TEIQue-SF Emotionality	.25**
TEIQue-SF Sociability	.25**
R^2 step 1	.19***
ΔR^2 step 2	.38***
R^2 total	.57***

Note. $N = 167$; * $< .05$, ** $< .01$, *** $p < .001$; BFQ = Big Five Questionnaire; TEIQue-SF = Trait Emotion Intelligence Questionnaire Short Form; HCSLS = Human Capital Sustainability Leadership Scale.

Discussion

The present study aimed to examine the associations between trait EI and HCSL, controlling for personality traits. The two hypotheses of this research were confirmed. A positive association emerged between trait EI and HCSL (H1), also controlling for personality traits (H2). In particular, TEIQue-SF Emotionality, TEIQue-SF Sociability, and TEIQue-SF Well-being proved to be associated with HCSL. These results underlined that Trait EI, in terms of workers' Self-perception of emotional ability (i.e., to regulate the capacity to relate to themselves and

to others) and workers' Self-perception of social ability (i.e., to regulate the capacity to respond to environmental demands) (Petrides & Furnham, 2001), was associated with Human Capital Sustainability Leadership (i.e., a leadership style focused on healthy people as flourishing and resilient workers) (Di Fabio & Peiró, 2018), underlining that the individual ability to handle the emotional and relational aspects of work is linked to a higher capability of assuming a sustainable leadership style in the workplace. Specifically, the aspect of trait EI relative to a generalized sense of well-being which extends from past achievements to future expectations, such as positive feelings, happiness and fulfilment (Petrides & Furnham, 2001), was linked to HCSL (Di Fabio & Peiró, 2018).

This research has a limitation, as the participants were a group of Italian workers from the region of Tuscany, they are thus not representative of all Italian workers. Future studies should therefore extend the analysis of the associations between these variables to participants from different areas of Italy. It may also prove interesting to conduct this research in other countries in an international context and from a cross-cultural perspective. Another limitation regards the cross-sectional design that does not enable causality to be detected. Future studies should be longitudinal. Moreover, future research could consider HCSL as an independent variable in relation to well-being (both hedonic and eudaimonic well-being).

Whether the findings of the present research are confirmed in the future or not, a new scenario emerged for interventions to enhance trait EI in strength-based prevention perspectives (Di Fabio & Saklofske, 2021) and especially for early intervention in a primary prevention perspective (Di Fabio & Kenny, 2015, 2016a; Hage et al., 2007; Kenny & Hage, 2009), in order to promote HCSL. Furthermore, HCSL (Di Fabio & Peiró, 2018) in the workplace could promote sustainable development at work (Di Fabio, 2017b; Di Fabio & Rosen, 2018) for healthy organizations and healthy business (Di Fabio, 2017a; Di Fabio et al., 2020).

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