Social and Emotional Competence among Managers

The precision of ratings

Joakim Skoogh
Abstract

Social and emotional competence is a vital part of leadership, it is therefore important to understand how variables such as gender, age and education can influence a manager’s social and emotional competence. This study analyse self-rating, other-rating and predicted-rating of managers belonging to different social groups using multi source feedback assessment, where both the managers and their subordinates answer a survey rating the managers social and emotional competence. Findings suggest that managers in general tend to underestimate the ratings from their subordinates. In addition, male and female managers rate themselves similar but the subordinates rate the female leaders higher. Education was also investigated but the sample was too small to draw any conclusions. The findings also suggest that all three ratings decrease in relation to the age of the manager. Further discussions about the implications of the findings as well as possibilities for future studies are presented in the end.

Keywords: Self-awareness, performance appraisal, gender, age, education, ratings

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Introduction

Leadership is very important in today’s society, this can be seen in all the focus and attention both the subject and its practitioners get on a daily basis. There are countless of articles written about the subject and “We hear about the importance of true leadership in nearly every sphere of human endeavour” (Alvesson and Spicer, p 1, 2011). It is safe to say that leadership has held an important role in the history of mankind since the dawn of history (Wren, 1995).

But since leadership can be practiced in different ways and consist of separate components, the question ‘What is leadership?’ becomes very important. James MacGregor Burns famously stated that “Leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth” (MacGregor Burns, p 2, 1978) which give a glimpse of the vast subject leadership. In the article “The relevance of emotional intelligence for leadership performance” the authors choose to look at the concept of leadership in another way, instead of asking what leadership is they asked what is important for leadership. They found that emotional intelligence was positively correlated with general leadership performance (Dulewicz, 2006; Taylor and Hood, 2011). There are also studies linking emotional intelligence to social intelligence defining emotional intelligence as “The subset of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions” (Huy, p 325, 1999; Salovey and Mayer, p 189, 1990) which imply the connection between social intelligence and general leadership performance.

By being aware of their own social and emotional intelligence, leaders can get an increased understanding of the way they practice leadership, understanding their strengths and weaknesses and thus increase their performance. There are different ways to achieve awareness about one’s social and emotional competence; one commonly used is performance appraisal where the individual is compared to a certain standard in order to determine where and why improvements are needed. By using a practice called multi-source feedback a leader could receive feedback regarding their social and emotional intelligence from different sources. The use of such an appraisal system tend to give a more thorough picture of a leaders performance and also in some aspects fairer since it provides more than one opinion (Fletcher, 2001). To further increase the value of such performance appraisals one could compare them to the managers own perceptions, this would give more relevance to the ratings. Adding yet another layer on it would be to let the manager predict the performance appraisal which would serve as “An internal evaluation that asks about specific relationships in a specific context” (Taylor and Hood, p 632, 2011).

Looking at individual performance appraisal, researchers would not be able to notice any trends or implications. But by collecting a larger set of data and then divide them into relevant groups some occurrences could be noticed. This was done in an American study performed by Taylor and Hood (2011) where they had a primary focus on gender and its implications on social and emotional competence. In their study they gathered data from a large set of managers and divided the data based on the variables age and gender (Taylor and Hood, 2011).
The purpose of this study is to perform a similar study as Taylor and Hood did but in another setting and with an additional focus on education besides the gender and age perspective. That means that I will need to compare the same three ratings that they did, using a method known as the 360-degree feedback system (Hazucha et al., 1993, Atwater and Brett, 2006, Waldman et al., 1998):

- How managers rate their own social and emotional competence (will hereby be written as self-rating)
- How managers predict that their subordinates will rate their social and emotional competence (will hereby be written as predicted-rating)
- How the subordinates actually rates their managers social and emotional competence (will hereby be written as other-rating)

By doing so I will have three kinds of ratings for each manager participating, those will then be put into a table where the different ratings can be examined and compared. By dividing the ratings of each manager into subgroups based on the variables of gender, age and education I might be able to identify certain relations and compare those to the findings of Taylor and Hood (2011).

I’ve chosen to perform this study in Sweden which is a country with noticeable differences from USA. These differences can be seen in Hofstedes country comparison, the comparison shows that there are ratings which are similar between Sweden and USA such as power distance and indulgence and some that are fairly different such as individualism, pragmatism and uncertainty avoidance. But when comparing these two countries there are one rating that differs a lot, the masculinity rating where Sweden has 5 and USA has 62. (Hofstede, 1997)

These differences might present different results when comparing this study with the one done by Taylor and Hood. Not only could such a comparison highlight certain differences between the two countries, but it will also create incentive for further studies in social and emotional competence and the possibility for further comparison. This subject is of particular interest for me since social and emotional competence is a concept constantly present in the area of leadership but has not received that much attention. I believe that the awareness of one's social and emotional competence might enable personal growth for people in general, which would be especially advantageous for managers since human contact is important for them.

Statistics shows that the percentage of female managers decrease from about 30% to 12% when comparing between middle-management and higher-management (Ledarna, 2012), this implies that I would need to focus my study on the middle management in order to find managers with different sets of variables (gender, age and education). This study will therefore focus on middle-managers from different groups based on the variables of gender, age and education.
Disposition

This study will first provide the reader with the research design and methodology in order to provide the setting, purpose and the necessary understanding of the concepts. This is then followed by a theoretical framework where the concept of performance appraisal and social identity theory are discussed in order to create relevant hypotheses. These hypotheses are then discussed and compared to the empirical material followed by a discussion regarding the results. The study is then summed up in a conclusion where the findings are put in relation to the studies purpose.

Research design and methodology

Research design

The main difference between qualitative and quantitative research methods is that the qualitative method is “Open-ended” (Creswell, 2007, p. 6) and that the quantitative method is “Closed-ended” (Creswell, 2007, p. 6). This means that qualitative studies are open to additional information (as can be with interviews) whereas quantitative studies are closed to additional information (questions in a survey). Since the purpose of this study was to compare three different ratings for a larger set of managers, any additional data would be unnecessary. In addition, my intention was to replicate the study performed by Taylor and Hood (2011) and that required me to gather the same type of data as they did. Based on this reasoning it seemed like the quantitative method would be the wisest choice for me. By using such a method the data collection could be performed in a much smoother way, since the information I required could be gather with a survey. This enabled me to contact managers from a larger geographical area and it also gave them the possibility to respond to my survey when they felt they had the time. Another reason for the choice of method was that I needed a large set of managers for the comparison to be able to show any relations between the ratings and the different variables.

In the study performed by Taylor and Hood (2011) they gathered data regarding the participant’s age, gender, race, education and workplace experience but in their analysis they only use the variables of age and gender. Since my purpose is to replicate their study in another setting I’ve decided to use both age and gender as variables used to divide the participants. But I’ve also decided to use education as an additional variable since I find the relation between education and social and emotional competence very interesting.

To be able to compare the hypothesis to a suitable diverse population, I’ve decided to focus on the subgroup of managers known as middle managers, one that is not the part of the senior management but neither part of the lowest part of the hierarchical system; someone who both is a manager and has a manager (Aucoin, 1989). Due to language and geographical proximity I have chosen Sweden as the setting for the study. This could most probably affect the validity of the theories I use since most of the studies has taken place in other countries, the majority of them in the US which in some areas are quite different from Sweden.
**Population of the study**

The intended population for this study is managers who operate inside any kind of organization in Sweden, be it private or governmental. My understanding was that I would increase the diversity of the sample by focusing on the position of middle manager, compared to if the sample would have been from managers in general or managers from the higher part of the hierarchy.

**Sampling procedure**

In order to get hold of a sample I contacted a number of medium to large organizations in Sweden, both private and governmental where I asked their human resource manager if they would allow me to get in contact with middle managers inside their organization. When contacting organizations for this study I used the top 50 companies from a list of the largest companies in Sweden (Veckans Affärer, 2013) in addition to all the municipality’s in Sweden (Sveriges Kommuner och Landsting, 2014). My focus where on larger organizations in order to increase the amount of managers I got in contact with, since I assumed that most of the managers I got in contact with would not have the time to participate. With this procedure my first obstacle was to convince the human resource manager that my study were of interest for their organization and then I needed to convince the middle managers that they should be a part of the study. In some cases the HR-department sent me a list of managers matching my criteria to me and in other cases they sent my contact-information to managers and let them contact me if they were interested.

Based on this procedure I cannot be sure about the answering ratio and thus I have no information about the statistics. But according to a study performed by the Swedish union for managers Ledarna there are 504 000 managers in Sweden and 85% of those are either “Mellanchefer” or “Första linjens chefer” which based on my stated definitions are what I seek. In addition 36, 5% of the population is women and the average age is 45. (Ledarna, 2012) Regarding the general education of managers, the managers union in Sweden (Ledarna) did an survey in 2011 with SCB (statistiska centralbyrå) and found out that 54,1% of managers in Sweden has some kind of higher education (eftergymnasial) which leaves 45,9% with an upper secondary or below (Personal communication, K. Andersson, 2014-04-14).

In addition, almost 90% of the organizations that decided to participate in this survey were governmental which have a slightly different ratio regarding gender and age of the managers. According to the Swedish government about 80% of all those who are employed by the government are female. The ratio between male and female managers depends on which hierarchical level you look at. At the highest level (known as A-manager) there are about 60% men and 40% women, whereas at the second level (known as B-manager) there are about 45% men and 55% women. At the lowest hierarchical level (the C-managers) the ratio is 28% men and 72% women. There are also a difference in the average age when comparing the governmental managers and the average manager: the age of the average manager is 45 years
whereas the average age of the governmental manager is 52 years. (Chefer i kommuner och landsting, 2011)

**The sample**

I ended up with 50 complete sets of data consisting of 2 surveys from the manager and between 1 to 3 surveys from the managers’ subordinates using the 360-degree feedback system. So at the end of the study I had 187 surveys, 100 of them were from the 50 managers and 87 were from the subordinates. In order to have 3 surveys for each manager I had to calculate the mean for those managers who had ratings from more than 1 subordinate.

This sample could be divided in three way based on the personal information I asked of the managers, those were gender, age and education. I decided to use men and woman as parameters for the gender variable and for the age variable I used three sets of ages: below 40, 40 - 48 and above 48 based on the research done by Taylor and Hood (2011) in order to make the research comparable. For education I used university/college as one alternative and upper secondary school or below as the other.

Gender: Men/Women = 8/42  
Age: >40/40-48/48< =10/21/19  
Education: upper secondary education or below/higher education = 3/47

Compared to the statistics of the population (Ledarna, 2012, SKL, 2011) some general conclusions can be drawn, firstly the gender proportions resemble more the statistics of the governmental middle and lower level of managers than the general statistics. This seems likely since the focus on the lower parts of the management and the high amount of governmental organizations participating. Secondly the age proportions seems quite correct compared to the average, which seems quite reasonable especially considering the high level of education of the sample. It can also be that the greater amount of the sample has higher education which is in contrast to the 54, 1% mentioned earlier. This difference might be due to the gender ratio or that a large part of the sample comes from governmental organizations. Another explanation might be that the level of education seems to rise in relation to hierarchical level of the manager (Personal communication, K. Andersson, 2014-04-14).

In addition, the number of managers who showed interest in participating in the survey from the beginning was 127 which give an answer rating of 50/127. In some of those cases I did not receive any surveys at all and in some cases I received the self-rating and the predicted rating or the self-rating and the other-rating but only in 50 cases I received both.
Instrumentation

The study was performed using a survey based on a webpage designed for this purpose (webropolsurveys.com). The survey were a MSF (Multi Source Feedback) focused on social and emotional competence called Emotional Competence Inventory – University or the ESCI-U which was developed by Richard Boyantzis and Daniel Goleman and that has been used in a previous study done by Scott N Taylor and Jacqueline N Hood (Taylor and Hood, 2011). I received the survey from Taylor through email and got it translated by an independent professional translator, who is fluent in both English and Swedish and who has knowledge in the studied topic, into Swedish in order to increase the understanding of those who participated.

The survey consists of 3 demographical questions asking for gender, age and education and 27 different items, 3 for each of 9 competencies which are:


These are graded using a 5-point Likert scale (Likert, 1932) to measure the frequency the person being rated demonstrate the 27 different items. The grading goes from 1 – Never shown, 2 – almost never shown, 3 – Sometimes shown, 4- often shown and 5 - Consistently shown.

Data collection

For each manager I used three kinds of surveys, one meant for the manager to write down the personal view of the questions (known as self-rating), one for the managers subordinates where they wrote down their point of view (known as other-rating) and one where the manager tried to predict the view of the subordinates (known as predicted-rating)

As I sent out the first survey I also asked the manager to contact a couple of subordinates who might be interesting to do a social and emotional competence evaluation of the manager in question. The fact that the manager got to choose which subordinates to do the evaluation has large likelihood to affect the result. But since some of the subordinates I have been in contact with decided not to answer the survey, the manager cannot be sure which subordinate/subordinates that are doing the evaluation.

In order to increase the validity of the third survey (predicted rating) I sent it out to the manager after the first survey (self-rating) was answered. This increases the chances that the questions are thought through yet again. By letting the subordinates participating in the performance assessment of the manager to be anonymous, the assessment might be a bit more truthful compared to a situation where the assessment would be done openly.
Ethical considerations

In order to protect those who participate in this study I’ve used an identification code based on what time they entered the study and the same code has been used by the subordinates when they did their assessment of the manager.

Data preparation and presentation

The preparation of the data was done in three stages; firstly all the surveys connected to each individual was analysed by calculating the means for each of the surveys. Secondly they were divided into groups based on the measured variables. Here they presented a more general picture regarding these variables and social and emotional competence. The third step was to compare these different groups to each other in order to test the hypotheses. By arranging the data into different groups I was able to calculate the means, correlation and the standard deviations based on the different variables. This enabled me to use the samples in different contexts, for example if I wanted to measure the sets based only on gender or education.

In order to correctly present my data I’ve been using calculations establishing the mean, the standard deviation, the intercorrelation between the studied variables and the Cronbach's alpha which is used to establish the internal consistency of the data.

One difference that can be seen when comparing this study to the one performed by Taylor and Hood (2011) is that they tested if the different means were statically different from each other. The reason this study lack this kind of statistical comparison is that the amount of data I have managed to gather are of lesser size than the one used by Taylor and Hood which decrease the statistical significance, i.e. the probability that the ratings is not due to chance, of the data and thus making such a comparison irrelevant.

Methodological limitations

There are some limitations to my choice of methodology that needs to be addressed. First and in my opinion most important is that the survey questions that I have used are based on the Taylor and Hodds (2011) study and might therefor be customized for the American corporate climate. Secondly, using surveys required the respondents to interpret the questions in their own way which could have affected the results as their understanding of the questions might not be the one I intended. Additional limitations can be found in the use of the quantitative method; by only focusing on predesigned questions, I might have missed out on relevant information that could have improved the study.

As been mentioned before, the sample is not perfect representation of the intended population. This could have been partly corrected by weighting the data to match the population. But since I used three kinds of variables, such an operation would have been too chaotic and hard for the readers to make sense of. Thus I used the skewed sample and made sure that the difference of the participators gender, age and education were clear.
Theories and hypothesis

Performance appraisal

In order to maximize future efficiency and utilize employee development possibilities, it is important for organizations to ensure that the goals of the employees correlate with the organizations goals. This can be a bit difficult, even if those goals where turned into numbers, since it can be hard to measure how much one individual employee contributes to the overall organizational performance. For this purpose the concept of performance appraisal has been created, which “Involves assigning a value to employee behaviours or work outputs in term of a criterion of productivity effectiveness” (Huber and Riggs, p 596, 1998). By connecting the outcome of such appraisals to organizational rewards or punishments (promotions, compensations, demotions or terminations) the organization has the possibility to show the employees that good performance gives positive results. (Huber and Riggs, 1998)

Through the years there has been some debate regarding the practical effect of the performance appraisal. One argument is that the appraisal is very time consuming and that there are no measurable payoff. Another is that since such appraisals concern one of the more emotional connected activities in a person’s life, such process easily could lead to conflicts. All though such a process could be very positive for both the organization and the employee since future development could be customized, it is not always easy to be evaluated based on performance. Even a positive evaluation could have an impact on an employee’s self-esteem which could affect future performance (Huber and Riggs, p 596, 1998). There is also evidence (McGregor, 1957) that managers tend to avoid informing the employee about the results of performance appraisals due to different reasons such as wanting to avoid criticizing the employee and dislike or even mistrust towards the performance evaluation system at large. Even though there are arguments raised against the use of performance appraisals there has been a trend, particularly during the 70s and 80s of increased reliance on such systems.

One particular type of performance appraisal that rose in popularity during the 90’s and has been used frequently since then, the 360-degree feedback system (Hazucha et al., 1993, Atwater and Brett, 2006, Waldman et al., 1998). By using multiple sources of feedback from supervisors, co-workers and subordinates the appraisal might mirror different sides of the same individual. In addition, these 360-degree feedbacks are anonymous which enables the ones giving the feedback to be open and honest (Hazucha et al., 1993), this could provide the person in question with a more accurate self-perception (Waldman et al., 1998). There are studies supporting the claim that this kind of feedbacks can provide changes in both behaviour in general (Bracken and Rose, 2011) and in management skill in particular (Hazucha et al., 1993, Hellervik et al., 1992). This implies that 360-degree feedback is one way to create change and development on a manager-level. Research has shown that an increased self-awareness of a manager can have a positive impact on the organizational culture, creating a higher level of participatory (Waldman, 1998). There is also a study connecting an improvement in the 360-degree feedback rating to an increased subordinate satisfaction, engagement and a less likelihood for the subordinates to leave (Atwater and Brett, 2006). One
important part of the 360-degree feedback is to have the one evaluated to do a self-evaluation (Waldman et al., 1998) in order to the individuals own perceptions to compare with the feedback, this to achieve the previously mentioned self-awareness. Studies has shown that self-ratings has a tendency to be inflated, that there is an noticeable difference between the opinion of the one doing the self-evaluation and the ones managing the performance appraisals (Yammariono and Atwater, 1997, Taylor and Hood, 2011). By comparing the self-evaluation with evaluation from others, the differences caused by the inflation can be useful for the development of what’s measured; behaviour, abilities, skills etc. (Yammariono and Atwater, 1997).

Something interesting occurs when those evaluated were asked to predict the rating they were given by others, that prediction tended to be lower than the self-rating. The prediction works as an internal evaluation of the relationship two actors inside the particular context they work in (Taylor and Hood, 2011). This would mean that the accuracy of the prediction depends on the relationship between the two actors. In addition, research has shown that people who receive negative feedback tend to avoid seeking feedback in the future in fear of more negative feedback (Moss and Sanchez, 2004). My assumption is that most workplace relations are not close and that most people have received negative feedback at one time or another, resulting in negative assumptions about the view of others. This would mean that if a manager where asked to predict how a subordinate rate the manager, the managers prediction would be lower than the rating the subordinate expressed. The first hypothesis will therefore be:

Hypothesis 1: When asked to predict the other-rating, the predicted-rating will be lower than the other-rating.

**Social identity theory**

There are different theories regarding group processes and intergroup relations, one of the most prominent is the social identity theory which argues that people tend to classify themselves based on which social groups they belong to (hobbies, religion, age etc.). By doing so individuals has the tools to define others, this in turns results in what is called stereotypes. It also enables the individual to define one self’s position in the social environment. Finding ones social identity is a vital part in finding one’s personal identity, even with two individuals belonging to the same social groups their social identity depends on how they value each social group. (Hornsey, 2008, Ashforth and Mael, 1989)

By looking at our society we find that gender is a social group which is held important by most, but some find religion or political opinion of higher importance. In addition, there is a theory called social identity threat (Steele et al, 2002) which could explain certain behaviours. It states that an individual will underperform when its social identity is threatened. This is common in regards to stereotypes where a certain social identity is connected to a certain performance. This is exemplified in an article by Steele et al (2002) where they investigate why women seems to perform worse than men at high-level math exams. Their explanation is that since the stereotypes classify women as inferior than men at math, their social identity
gets threatened and they perform worse (Steele et al, 2002). This occurrence has been widely documented and it has shown that social identity threat can decrease performance in a variety of academic and non-academic domains such as female driving skills, white men in sports or the academic performance of individuals with low socioeconomically background (Stroessner and Good, 2011).

**Gender**

One way to approach the complex situation concerning how male and female managers are perceived would be to examine the concept of stereotypes. The basic thought about stereotypes is that men and women have different traits, both when it comes to service orientation and to achievement orientation. Furthermore there are certain types of behaviours that in the mind of the society are linked to a certain gender, whereas other types of behaviours are seen as the opposite (Heilman, 2002). This can be linked to the research done by London and Wohlers (1991) where they argue that “For women, career development means understanding and strengthen the self in relation to others - a struggle to combine attachment and accomplishment. For men, development is striving towards independence and self-sufficiency” (London and Wohlers, p 3, 1991).

There are many reasons for people to use stereotypes, one explanation for it is that “Stereotypes make information processing easier by allowing the perceiver to rely on previously stored knowledge in place of incoming information” (Hilton and von Hippel, p 238, 1996). The existence of such stereotypes and the tendency that almost all executive level and top management jobs are perceived as male or masculine (Heilman, 2002) has created a concept that now is known as the “Glass ceiling” which was coined in the middle of the 1980’s (Konrad and Cannings, 1994). This concept was created as a metaphor for the absence of women in the upper part of the organizational hierarchy. This in addition to the societies view of management being a masculine discipline and that you would need typical masculine attributes in order to succeed as a manager creates a certain bias in the evaluation of female managers (Heilman, 2002). The gender difference in management can also been seen through a Swedish context where only 36,5% of the managers are women (Ledarna, 2012) compared to 51,5% in the US (Bureau of labor statistics, 2013) and 22% in the world (United Nations Statistics Division, 2013). So even though Sweden is ranked as the 4th most equal country in the world (World Economic Forum, 2013) there are still inequality in the work sector.

Not only does stereotypes affect the promotion possibilities for men and women, studies has also shown that people tend to rely on stereotypes more strongly in situations where their attention were needed elsewhere or if the they were under time pressure (Martel, 2006). Based on that line of reasoning, women would receive worse evaluation results compared to men if the evaluation would take place in a complex environment (Martel, 2006). Then it is reasonable to assume that female managers in general would expect lower evaluations than they receive, especially when the appraisal is performed during normal circumstances. Additionally research has shown that “Women underestimated their performance more than men did when performance criteria were ambiguous but not when performance criteria were
clear” (Shore and Thornton, p 117, 1986). Studies have also shown a tendency for women to underestimate their performance in situations where no form of feedback was given (Lenney, 1977). This implies that stereotypes can create a perceived gender difference regarding social and emotional competency, where the women tend to underestimate themselves. This even though there are studies that show little difference between men and women (Taylor and Hood, 2011) and also studies where women show higher competence (Groves, 2005). Based on these theories two arguments can be made, the first is that the self-rating and the other-rating would be closer for women than for men. The second is that the self-rating would be lower for women than for men. This brings me to my second hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: Female managers will have a negative difference between self-rating and other-rating whereas male managers will have a positive difference.

Age
Since age is a constant factor in our lives, its relation to the practice of leadership is most interesting. In Sweden the average age of a manager is 45 (Ledarna, 2012) which according to a study performed by Kabacoff and Stoffey (2001) would mean that the majority of the Swedish leaders belong to the group they labelled the “Older age group” which would imply that the managerial climate in Sweden are influenced by attributes belonging to the older age group. These attributes are described as a more experience and delegation based leadership style whereas the younger age group tends to be more risk driven and energetic (Kabacoff and Stoffey, 2001). Studies have also shown that older managers compared to younger managers seem to favour the practice of consultation. This correlates with the above mentioned tendency for younger managers to be risky whereas older managers seem to want to ensure the performance by consulting others (Oshagbemi, 2002).

The connection between leadership and age can be further verified by an article written by Cornelius and Capsi (1987) where they not only connect social competency with the concept of crystallized intelligence which they define as primarily verbal abilities. They also state that the performance on verbal ability tests increase with age. This argument is further supported by the research done by Boyatzis and Sala (2004) where they state that ECI (emotional competency inventory)-ratings are positively related to age. Logic demands that this increase will at one point either stop or turn into a decrease, but this tend to be quite individual and will therefore not be taken into account.

In order to show the differences and similarities between managers of different ages, researchers (Oshagbemi, 2004, Kabacoff and Stoffey, 2001) in the field of age and relation tend to divide their data into three age groups. They then proceed to remove the middle group “To show the distinctive nature of the two age bands” (Oshagbemi, p 7, 2002). Seeing how age seem connected to the amount of time spend consulting others, it is not a great leap to assume that older managers would be better at predicting the rating from others and thus have lesser gaps between the three ratings. So my second hypothesis is:
Hypothesis 3: Compared to the two other sets of managers, the differences between self, other and predicted-rating will be the lowest for the oldest set of managers

Education

Research has suggested that leadership experience of students during their years in college (which in Sweden would be translated to higher education) is strongly connected to their personal development during these years (Logue et al., 2005). Even though the development of leadership always has been at least an indirect goal of higher education, the number of schools offering courses on the subject of leadership has risen since the end of the 80’s (Brungardt, 1997). This can easily be connected to the increased focus today’s society put on the role of the leader; this is summarized in the quote “The leader has become one of the dominant heroes of our time” (Alvesson and Spicer, p1, 2011). In addition to this, researchers has shown that “The strong impact enhanced social and emotional behaviours can have on success in school and ultimately in life” (Zins et al., p 208, 2007) which strongly implies that schools has an interest in developing these competences in their students. This also holds true in Sweden where it is said that the development of social and emotional competence is of high importance in Swedish primary, secondary and high school (Skolverket grundskola, 2011, Skolverket gymnasium, 2011).

Additionally there is an article written by Reason et al (2007) that focus on the positive impact the first year of college has on student’s social and personal competence. Which imply that the environmental changes that comes with higher education, can result in a development of social competences. Another study performed by Zhao and Kuh (2004) argues that the reality is a bit more complex than that higher studies equals heightened social competency; they present data claiming that the engagement in learning communities results in “Greater gains in intellectual and social development compared with peers who did not participate in learning communities” (Zhao and Koh, p 4, 2004). Cornelius and Caspi 1987) also determine that education is highly related to verbal abilities which earlier in this study been connected to social competency. This implies that higher education provides the opportunities for an increase in social competence but that higher education in no way provides high social competence. Yet another interesting perspective is presented in an article by Wentzel (1996) where social responsibility is connected to academic prowess. Based on this reasoning students with higher social competence would behave in a social responsible way and furthermore perform better in school and would have a higher chance of ending up in higher education.

It seems reasonable to make the assumption that there is a correlation between higher education and social and emotional competence. Based on the theories it seems that education would play a greater part of the development than many of the other variables, which bring me to my fourth hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4: When comparing the managers with higher education and the managers with lower education, the average of the three ratings will be higher for the first set.
Table 1: The mean, standard deviation and intercorrelation among studied variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
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<td>1. Gender</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Age</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0.48**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Education</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.40**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Self</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>-0.21*</td>
<td>-0.21*</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
<td>(0.75)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Other</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>-0.15</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.22*</td>
<td>(0.93)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Predicted</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>-0.16</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>0.73**</td>
<td>0.33**</td>
<td>(0.91)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Correlation significant at p <.05 (2-tailed); **correlation significant at p <.01 (2-tailed)

Notes: Reliabilities are on the diagonal in parentheses (Cronbach’s alpha)

1. Gender: 1 = female, 2 = male
2. Age: 1 = >40, 2 = 40-48, 3 =48<
3. Education = 1 = Upper secondary school or below, 2 = Higher education
4. Self-rating – The managers own perspective, based on 27 items measured on a 5-points Likert-scale assessing frequency of demonstration
5. Other-rating – The subordinates perspective, based on 27 items measured on a 5-points Likert-scale assessing frequency of demonstration
6. Predicted-rating – The managers prediction of the subordinates perspective, based on 27 items measured on a 5-points Likert-scale assessing frequency of demonstration
Result:

Hypothesis 1

Based on the correlation matrix in Table 1 it is easy to distinguish that there are some noticeable differences in how the managers believe that their subordinates rate them: the predicted-rating (3,50 SD 0,37) and how the subordinates actually rate them: the other-rating (3,69 SD 0,48). This data imply that managers tend to underestimate the opinion of their subordinates. Another interesting relationship that can be seen at Table 1 is that the self-rating (3,64 SD 0,26) are lower than the other-rating suggesting that the subordinates have a more positive picture of the managers social and emotional competence than the manager. The difference between those two ratings are quite similar showing a certain degree of self-awareness from the manager, all though the standard deviation for the other-rating are higher than for the self-rating showing that there are a higher variation in those ratings.

Additional support for the relation between other-rating and predicted-rating can be seen at Table 2 where the same variables are investigated in different groups (gender, age and education) and all but one group shows the same relation. This supports the first of my Hypothesis that “When asked to predict the other-rating, the predicted-rating will be lower than the other-rating”. The ratings also provides an interesting perspective regarding the relation between self-rating, other-rating and predicted-rating that could be investigated further in the future.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>M(SD) Other-rating</th>
<th>M (SD)Predicted-rating</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender 1</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>3,71(0,44)</td>
<td>3,48(0,35)</td>
<td>-0,23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender 2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3,61(0,47)</td>
<td>3,57(0,51)</td>
<td>-0,04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3,92(0,31)</td>
<td>3,67(0,41)</td>
<td>-0,25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 2</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3,64(0,41)</td>
<td>3,50(0,42)</td>
<td>-0,14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 3</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3,64(0,50)</td>
<td>3,40(0,27)</td>
<td>-0,24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education 1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3,60(0,84)</td>
<td>3,63(0,62)</td>
<td>0,03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education 2</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>3,70(0,42)</td>
<td>3,49(0,36)</td>
<td>-0,21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>3,69(0,44)</td>
<td>3,50(0,37)</td>
<td>-0,19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Hypothesis 2

In table 3 the gender difference in self-rating and other-rating is investigated. Both genders seems to rate themselves about the same (difference of 0, 01) but the difference in how the subordinates rate them differ with 0,1, showing a situation where the social and emotional competence of women is perceived as higher than the men’s. It can also be seen that the difference between the self-rating and the other-rating is closer to zero for the male managers, meaning that they might have a more realistic perspective on their social and emotional competence higher than the female managers does.

The relation is even clearer when comparing the difference between the self-rating and the other-rating for both genders, not only is the difference for women negative but it is also almost three times as large as the difference for the men. Based on these differences, support can be given to the second hypothesis that “Female managers will have a larger negative difference between self-rating and other-rating than male managers”.

Table 3: The mean differences between self-rating and other-rating among gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>M(SD)Self-Rating</th>
<th>M(SD)Other-rating</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender 1</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>3,63(0,24)</td>
<td>3,71(0,44)</td>
<td>-0,08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender 2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3,64(0,36)</td>
<td>3,61(0,47)</td>
<td>0,03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hypothesis 3

As shown in Table 4, all of the manager’s ratings drop in relation to the variable of age. This paints a picture where the social and emotional competence slowly decreases over the years. Looking at the differences between the ratings one thing stand out; the way the ratings drop noticeably between the first and the second group (-0,19 for self-rating, -0,28 for other-rating and -0,17 for predicted) but not that much between the second and the third (-0,06 for self-rating, -0,00 for other-rating and -0,10 for predicted).

Looking at the sum of the differences between the ratings (e.g. the added differences between self-rating, other-rating and predicted-rating) for the three age groups, one can see that the sum of the differences for age group 1 and 3 are very similar. Whereas age group 2 are far below, this does not support my third hypothesis which says that “The differences between self, other and predicted-rating will decrease in relation to age”. The hypothesis held true when comparing the first and the second age group, but the decrease in predicted-rating between the second and the third age group meant that the hypothesis could not be verified.

Table 4: The alignment of the three ratings in relation to age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>M(SD)Self-rating</th>
<th>M(SD)Other-rating</th>
<th>M(SD)Predicted-rating</th>
<th>Sum of the difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age 1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3,81(0,34)</td>
<td>3,92(0,31)</td>
<td>3,67(0,41)</td>
<td>0,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 2</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3,62(0,20)</td>
<td>3,64(0,41)</td>
<td>3,50(0,42)</td>
<td>0,28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 3</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3,56(0,25)</td>
<td>3,64(0,50)</td>
<td>3,40(0,27)</td>
<td>0,48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Hypothesis 4**

When comparing the sample based on their education, the ratings are quite similar with the more educated group a little behind in both self-rating and predicted-rating and a little ahead in the other-rating. This difference show that the group with higher education has less optimistic perspective of their own social and emotional competence whereas the group with lesser education are aware of the views of their subordinates (difference of 0.03 between other-rating and predicted-rating) but a somewhat inflated view of themselves.

Looking further at the table, the overall-rating shows a higher mean for the less educated group showing a more unified picture of their social and emotional competence than the higher educated group. This does not support the fourth hypothesis which said that “When comparing the managers with higher education and the managers with lower education, the average of the three ratings will be higher for the first set”

Even though the ratio between the two groups is much skewed, the implications of the data might still be useful: In particular the apparent difference in self-image that has been noticed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>M(SD)Self-rating</th>
<th>M(SD)Other-rating</th>
<th>M(SD)Predicted-rating</th>
<th>M(SD)Overall-rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education 1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.70(0.41)</td>
<td>3.60(0.84)</td>
<td>3.63(0.62)</td>
<td>3.64(0.56)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education 2</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>3.63(0.26)</td>
<td>3.70(0.42)</td>
<td>3.49(0.36)</td>
<td>3.61(0.36)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discussion**

This study has shown a couple of interesting relations in regards to the social and emotional competence of middle managers in Sweden that could have implications both for the field of study and the practitioners of leadership.

As seen in hypothesis 1, there are a noticeable difference between the other-rating and the predicted-rating. Based on the theories presented earlier this difference seems to be due to an absence of a closer relation between the manager and the subordinate, that the gap between other-rating and predicted-rating would symbolize the gap in the relation. The gap could also be due to a tendency to underestimate the opinion of others, due to earlier experience.

By looking further into the relations between self-rating, other-rating and predicted-rating additional relations can be noted. The most interesting one is that the ratings of others are slightly higher than the self-rating which verifies a relation earlier presented by Taylor and Hood (2011) where the self-rating is 3.87 and the other-rating is 3.93 (Taylor and Hood, p 13, 2011) which although higher shows the same relation as the self-rating of 3.64 and other-rating of 3.69 shown in this study. A consequence of this is of course that the predicted-rating and the other-rating are the two most separated ratings, which could be a testament to the
insecurity of the managers. It could also be that instead of an inflation of the self-rating it is due to a deflation of the predicted-rating, a form of false modesty. Nevertheless it implies that the theory of inflated self-rating seems to be incorrect and that the opinions of managers and subordinates are quite similar.

Looking at this from the point of the practitioners the knowledge of the gap between other-rating and predicted-rating could ease the pressure on the managers who might have a false assumption regarding the opinions of the subordinates. On the other hand, if the gap really is due to a deflation of the predicted-rating then the knowledge of the gap might raise the self-rating.

Continuing to the second hypothesis where the data set is divided into groups based on gender, one major thing differs from the earlier discussed relation between self-rating, other-rating and predicted-rating. Here it can be seen that the women’s predicted-rating (3,48) is far below both self-rating (3,63) and other-rating (3,71) which follows the relation presented in the general data. But for the men both self-rating (3,64), other-rating (3,61) and predicted-rating (3,57) are quite similar. This shows a relation where the ratings of the female managers are lower than the ratings of the subordinates whereas the male managers show certain awareness. The similarity of the general data and the female data are due to the large amount of women compared to men taking part of the study, but it still shows a difference in behaviour between the two groups.

It can also be seen that the difference between the self-rating and the other-rating is higher for women than for men (-0,08 for women and 0,03 for men) which is in line with the findings of Taylor and Hood (2011). But this relation is the opposite of the results found in a study done by London and Wohlers (1991) where they compare self-ratings and the ratings of the subordinates for both men and women. In their study, London and Wohlers (1991) argue that women are more likely than men to be concerned about interpersonal relationships and thus have a lesser difference between self-rating and other-rating than the men. I argue that the differences between the results found in this study as well as the study done by Taylor and Hood (2011) and the study done by London and Wohlers could be due to the chronological difference. It has happened a lot during the years between the 1991 and 2011 and it is not unlikely that this could have affected the relation between self-rating and other-rating for women. The arguments made for the current situation with higher other-rating than self-rating for women has mostly been focusing on that women receive judgments based on stereotypes in their everyday life and therefore has a negative perspective regarding their own competence. But this study has shown that women are seen as having higher social and emotional competence than the men, which can be seen when comparing the other-rating.

Looking at the self-rating one can see that the ratings are almost identical (3,63 for women and 3,64 for men), this relation mirrors the ones found by Taylor and Hood (2011, p 16) where the self-rating for men were 3,88 and the one for women were 3,86. Additional similarities can be found between the two studies: The predicted-rating is higher for men than for women but the other-rating shows the opposite relation which is the same as in this study.
The one thing that stands out when looking at the relation between the two studies is that the ratings are a bit lower in this study. This can have different reasons, for example the difference in setting or the difference in the sample size. But it still supports the relations presented in the study.

Looking further at the implications of this study, the first thing that’s come to mind is that it further verify that there is a gender-difference between the prediction of the ratings of others. It also shows that the earlier mentioned self-rating inflation might be more of a gender aspect than mentioned in the study done by Yammariono and Atwater (1997). Regarding the practitioners perspective it can be said that a more open discussion about social and emotional competence might achieve gainful results. If the managers had a better picture of how their subordinates perceive them, then they have the possibility to adapt the situation to their personal strengths or vice versa.

The gender difference regarding the low predicted-rating shown among female managers could possibly provide an incensement for researchers to investigate how gender affects the 360-degree review. If this difference can be found in other samples then it could create additional insight regarding the efficiency of the method.

Proceeding to the third hypothesis, the reasoning was that an increase in age would benefit the social and emotional competence and also that this would benefit the awareness of one’s competence. Looking at the collected data; the age group with the least differences between the three ratings was the second group, whereas the group with the lowest ratings where the oldest. Which disproves my hypothesis but instead show another interesting relation, it seems that the overall ratings decline with age. This seems to be the case for each of the ratings with the exception of the other-rating for the third age group where there is no change.

In their research where they examined the connections between other-rating and self-ratings of leadership and boss/subordinate relationships, London and Wohlers argue that “Managers' work involvement, optimism about their future careers, personal and job satisfaction and identification with management decline over time” (London and Wohlers, p 3, 1991). They had the hypothesis that this age-related behaviour change would result in a greater difference between self-rating and other-rating. This hypothesis was disproved and further support for this can be seen in my data, the difference between self-rating and other-rating grow smaller from the first age group to the second and then rises again (from -0, 08 to 0,02 to -0,08). But I argue that there reasoning could have been correct, only that their hypothesis went the wrong way. My reasoning is that such a behavioural change would not only be noticed by the managers surrounding but also by the manager self. This would imply that the self-rating, other-rating and the predicted-rating would decline at a certain age which can be seen in the data. Comparing the three different ratings for the three age groups one notice that the decline between the first group and the second than between the second and the third. I argue that part of the reason for this decline is that managers get comfortable and thus invests less energy than younger managers.
Looking at practical implications of this data one can try to utilize the change in behaviour in order to maximize the managers’ performance; a decrease in social and emotional competence does not affect the other competences of the manager which could create many opportunities for the said manager and the organization.

The empirical data for the fourth hypothesis are a bit too thin to draw any direct conclusions, but looking at the data: the self-rating and the predicted-rating are higher for the lesser educated group than for the higher educated group whereas the other-rating are higher for the second group. Implied that there might be an increased self-view for the group with lesser education or it might be the other way around. This area of study has not been research as much as the other variables used in this study. So the implications from this hypothesis would probably be that the subject needs to be investigated more thoroughly.

**Conclusion**

The major finding in this study is the gender difference in the relation between the self-rating, the other-rating and the predicted-rating. That even though the self-rating are very similar, the difference between the other-rating and the predicted-rating are 6 times as high for women than for men. In addition, a similar relation can also be found when comparing the difference between self-rating and the other-rating for the two genders where the difference is 3 times as high.

Another finding of importance is the decline in ratings that can be found when comparing the different age-groups. This decline is more obvious when comparing the first and the second group but the decline is still apparent although with a lesser slope when comparing the second and the third group. It could also be stated that the subject of education in relation to social and emotional competence seems promising, but that further studies are needed in order to draw any conclusions.

This study has further proven the usefulness of MSF (multi source feedback) and the study has shown how such a tool could be used when investigating different variables among people. It has also shown that the model using predicted-rating in addition to self-rating and other-rating that were introduced by Taylor and Hood (2011) can be used in another setting.

**Limitations to the study**

One limitation to this study is that the data mostly comes from managers employed by the government which seems to have given a skewed ratio for both gender and education compared to the statistics. Another limitation would be that the participants where voluntary which could mean that managers who perceived their social and emotional competence as lacking decided to decline. In addition the way managers themselves selected subordinates for me to contact could most likely mean higher rating from the subordinates than normally. This might partly be countered by the anonymity of the subordinates and that I only present the compiled data, not the gathered.
If I would have gathered the gender of the subordinates then I might have been able to draw additional conclusions regarding the way individuals’ rate managers of their own gender compared to the opposite. This would have required a larger set of data to ensure the subordinates anonymity and most likely a longer time-span.

A major limitation of this study is the absence of a statistical analyse which is due to my personal inexperience in using statistical tools. So even though I’m able to show the relations between the ratings, I’m not able to provide the reader with information regarding if the ratings are statistically different from each other. Even though the comparison between different ratings that I present shows a certain relation, those relations cannot be statistically proven and thus no assumptions can be drawn based on them.

The consequences of the lack of such a comparison is that the results from this study cannot be compared to the results found by Taylor and Hood (2011), as they manage to present such statistical analysis and thus can prove the relevance of their findings. The lack of a statistical analysis weakens the arguments made in this study, but it can still be useful for future researchers to see the different relations presented in this study. In addition the data from this study mostly supports the findings of Taylor and Hood (2011) and thus strengthen their arguments.

References


