

## Females Exhibit Even Higher EI than Males at the CEO level

Genos Whitepaper #2

August 1st, 2008

### Summary

It has been suggested that in order for women to climb the corporate ladder, they must become more 'male-like'. Given that, in general, there is a tendency for men to score lower on EI than women, it may be suggested that women who are CEOs will not exhibit as much of a difference in EI in comparison to men. Based on the Genos EI normative database, this hypothesis was not supported. Instead, women CEOs exhibited an even larger "superiority" in EI to men, in comparison to the those men and women who are not CEOs. Consequently, it may be suggested that women who aspire to executive level positions in an organisation should both express and develop their emotional intelligence.

### Introduction

A respectable amount of research has accumulated documenting that women tend to report higher levels of emotional intelligence (EI) than men. The differences are not very large; however, they do appear to be consistent enough to be reliable. Gignac (2008) reported that women tend to score higher than men on most Genos EI subscales; however, the Emotional Self-Management and Emotional Self-Control subscales were two exceptions, with men tending to score somewhat higher than women.

A question that may be asked is whether women who work as CEOs also exhibit the tendency to score higher than men who work as CEOs. It has been suggested that women must exhibit "male-like" characteristics to "climb the corporate ladder".

That is, women seeking promotion to more senior levels within many male dominated organisations will adopt a range of characteristics typically associated with male employees. For example, considering 'only-the-facts' when making important decisions or failing to express one's feelings of personal hurt or fear to others.

Based on this suggestion, it would be expected that the magnitude of the difference in EI between women and men would differ, depending on whether one was examining a general sample versus a sample of CEOs.

Specifically, for the 'more male-like theory' to hold for CEO level employees, it would be expected that the differences between women and men EI levels would not be as large

for those men and women who are CEOs. Should this be the case it would indicate that women not only adopt more "male-like" characteristics (i.e., the less frequent demonstration of EI behaviours) in order to advance their careers, they continue these characteristics once they have reached-the-top.

Given the strong, positive association between EI and a leader's capacity to engage and motivate others, it would be, on one level, counter-intuitive to observe that female CEOs were possibly withholding the demonstration of emotionally intelligent behaviours. On the other hand, if the 'more male-like theory' were not supported by the data, it would suggest that women in the workforce who aspire to higher management levels should express and develop their EI.

#### Special points of interest:

- Women have frequently been found to exhibit higher levels of EI than men.
- One theory suggests that in order to climb the corporate ladder, women need to adopt more 'male-like' characteristics to succeed in the workplace.
- Based on the Genos EI normative database, however, women in the role of CEO exhibit higher levels of EI than males to a magnitude that is even larger than would be expected.

### Methods

To examine this issue, the Genos EI self-report normative sample (N=4775) data were analysed. Of the 4775 respondents, 291 reported to be employed as a CEO (65% men). The data were

examined based on a well-established measure of effect size known as Cohen's d. In some ways, a Cohen's d value may be viewed in a similar fashion to a Pearson correlation, with one of the exceptions being that

Cohen's d values can exceed 1.00. In this investigation, positive Cohen's d values are indicative of higher levels of EI in women, whereas negative values are indicative of higher levels of EI in men.

## Results

### Genos Emotional Intelligence

- Emotional Self-Awareness
- Emotional Expression
- Emotional Awareness of Others
- Emotional Reasoning
- Emotional Self-Management
- Emotional Management of Others
- Emotional Self-Control

On the left side of Figure 1 (see page 3), it can be observed that women within the Genos EI normative sample were found to score higher than men across all Genos EI subscales, with the exception of Emotional Self-Management and Emotional Self-Control (as reported in Gignac, 2008).

Importantly for the purposes of this whitepaper, *even larger* differences emerged in favour of women within the CEO portion of the Genos EI normative sample (right side Figure 1). The differences were most marked within the Emotional Management of Others and Emotional Reasoning subscales.

To get a more precise sense of how men and women CEOs differed with respect to EI, the two items with the EMO subscale and the two items within the ER subscale that exhibited the largest gender differences were identified. They are exhibited in the text box to the right.

#### Emotional Management of Others

- 'When necessary I effectively demonstrate empathy to colleagues.'
- 'I help people deal with issues that cause them frustration at work.'

#### Emotional Reasoning

- 'I ask others how they feel about different solutions when problem solving at work.'
- 'I demonstrate to others that I have considered their feelings in decisions I make at work.'

## Discussion

The suggestion that women in CEO roles may adopt more masculine (i.e., "male-like") characteristics with respect to EI (i.e., lower EI) was not supported in this investigation. Instead, the differences in levels of EI between women and men were more pronounced at the CEO level. It should be noted that this difference was not achieved because men in CEO roles had particularly low levels of EI. In fact, based on supplementary analyses, men CEOs tended to have higher levels of EI than men non-CEOs. Consequently, the effect reported in this investigation may be considered to have been achieved because women in CEO roles scored higher than would be

expected based on women non-CEO EI scores.

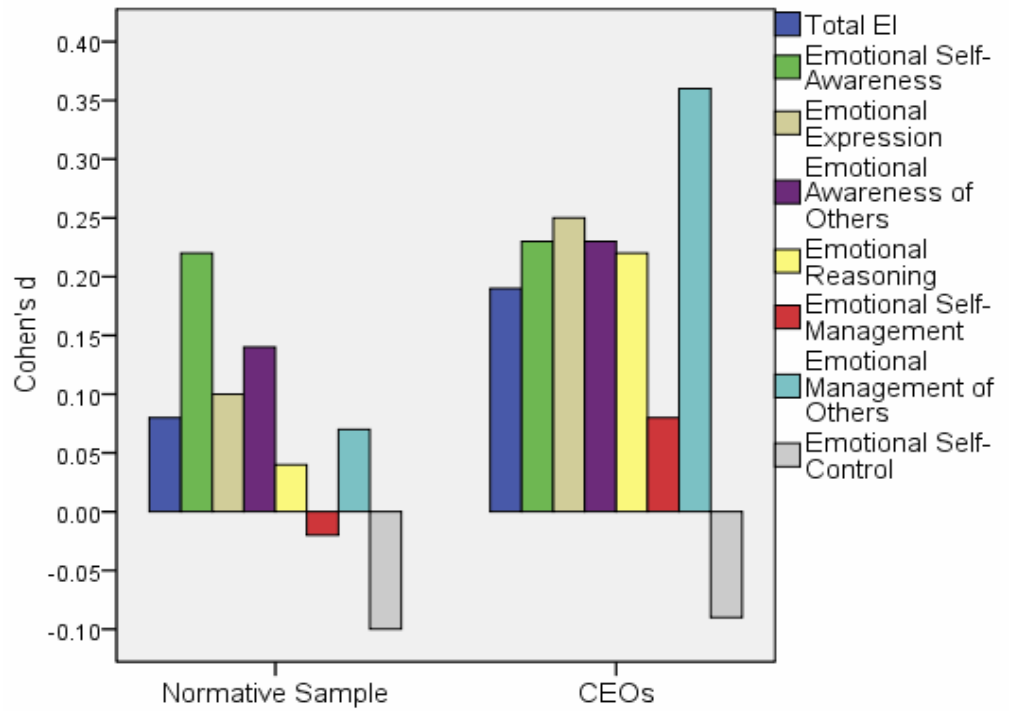
Precisely why women and men CEOs differ in EI more substantially at the CEO level may be deliberated and investigated further. Perhaps some women identify their emotional intelligence as a particular strength and consciously decide to develop and leverage that strength in the process of career development. Alternatively, it is possible that women simply have to score higher on a large number of attributes than men in order to be selected as a CEO of an organisation.

In conclusion, based on the results of this investigation, it may be

suggested that women should develop their levels of EI, if they aspire to become CEOs. This recommendation is contrary to the arguably widespread notion that a woman needs to become more temperamentally "male", if she wishes to gain senior level management position. At least with respect to EI, this notion does not appear to be accurate.

## Graphs

Gender Differences in EI: Normative Sample vs. CEOs



## References

Gignac, G. E. (2008). *Genos Emotional Intelligence Inventory: Technical Manual*. Genos Press: Sydney, NSW.