# THE CORRELATION OF ABILITY EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND SELF-LEADERSHIP (AS DEFINED BY INTERNAL FAMILY SYSTEMS) IN A TEAM SPORT CONTEXT

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## Why We Are Doing This Research

Research has established that increased Emotional Intelligence (EI) is beneficial for athletes and sports teams, as it has a positive correlation with team cohesion in sports, athletic performance and the application of mental skills. (See Appendix 1.) Research shows that Emotional Intelligence (EI) in many different contexts, including sport, can be trained. It remains unclear how EI can best be trained in a sport context. The hypothesis which motivated this study is that using concepts of Internal Family Systems (IFS) would be a successful to enhance athletes' EI in a team sport context.

## Abstract

This study aimed to determine if using the principles of Internal Family Systems (IFS) which promote Self-leadership to coach ability Emotional Intelligence (EI) in a sport/athletic context may be effective. This was a cross sectional study to determine if a correlation exists between EI and overall Self-leadership, and components of Self-leadership. Participants were 49 university level varsity rugby athletes. Ability Emotional Intelligence was measured by using the 33 item self-report ability Emotional Intelligence scale developed by Nicola Schutte, et als. (1998). Self-leadership was measured by the 20 item Brief Self-Leadership Scale developed by Steinhardt, et als. (2003). Linear regression analysis determined correlation. The correlation between Emotional Intelligence and Self Leadership Scores was found to be positive, significant (p=0.0001) and with a substantial effect size ( R2=0.2749). Based on the results, it can be concluded that enhancing Self-leadership as described by the IFS model could increase EI in a team sport context.

## Introduction

The concepts of Internal Family Systems (IFS) are likely to enhance athletes' EI in a team sport context. IFS has been shown to be an effective tool to train EI in other contexts, such as in the reduction of depressive symptoms in female University students (Haddock, Weiler, Trump & Henry, 2017) and to enhance communications and effective work relationships in corporate employees (Dolbier, Soderstrom & Steinhardt, 2011). The objective of this study was to determine if using the principles of Internal Family Systems (IFS), which promotes Self-Leadership, may be an effective way to impart and train ability Emotional Intelligence in a sport/athletic context. To that end, this research determined if Ability Emotional Intelligence, as recognized by Salovey and Mayer (1990) correlates positively with SelfLeadership, as described by the Internal Family Systems model. This study asked the question do Emotional Intelligence and Self-leadership (as described by the IFS model) positively correlate in a team sport context? To measure Ability Emotional Intelligence, the 33 item self-report Emotional Intelligence scale based on the Peter Salovey and John Mayer model of Ability EI as developed by Nicola Schutte, et al (1998) was used to quantify EI. In IFS, Self-leadership is characterized by the "8 C's", Curiosity, Compassion, Creativity, Courage, Confidence, Calm (Composure), Connectedness (Cohesion), and Clarity. Self-leadership was measured by the 20item Brief Self-Leadership Scale developed by Steinhardt, et al (2003.) Results confirmed a positive correlation between Ability Emotional Intelligence and total Self Leadership Scores, which were found to be significant and with a substantial Cohen's effect size.

## Research Question

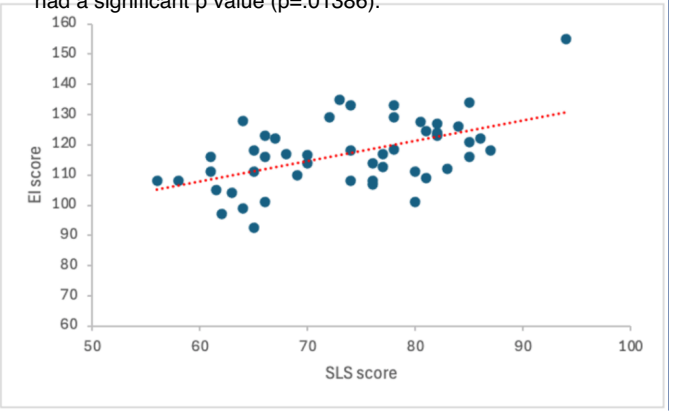
This study asked the question do Emotional Intelligence and Self-leadership (as described by the IFS model) positively correlate in a team sport context? Does Emotional Intelligence correlate with the individual aspects of Self-leadership as described by IFS?

## Methods

This was a cross sectional quantitative study. The participants were athletes on a Canadian university's Men's or Women's Varsity Rugby teams, ranging from 17 years to 24 years of age. Inventories were given to participants at the first session of pre-season training, and each inventory given at the same session. There were 49 total inventory scores for each the Emotional Intelligence Scale (Schutte, et als., 1998) and the Brief Self Leadership Scale (Steinhardt, et. als., 11 2003), 27 from the women's rugby team (WT), and 22 from the men's rugby team (MT). The MT and WT scores were combined to increase power with all 49 results. A linear regression was used to determine correlation and data analysis through the Excel program was used to analyze the data. Consent was obtained from the individual participants of this study, and the study was approved on May 27, 2024 by the University's Research Ethics Board. All assumptions were verified. The normality of the test scores were confirmed by a normal probability plot. A significance of $p < 0.05$ was used. R squared (R2) was used as a measure of effect size and categorized according to Cohen's recommendation. According to Cohen (1988, 1992) $R2 < 0.02$ - Very weak. $0.02 <= R2 < 0.13$ - Weak. $0.13 <= R2 < 0.26$ - Moderate. $R2 >= 0.26$ - Substantial. Pearson's R is also being reported, although there was one outlier. Overall correlation was determined between Emotional Intelligence and SelfLeadership. Emotional Intelligence as a predictor of the 8 individual characteristics of Self-12 Leadership in the IFS model was also looked at: confidence, clarity, connectedness, calm, curiosity, compassion, courage and creativity.

## Results

The correlation between Emotional Intelligence and total Self Leadership Scores was found to be significant (p=0.0001) and with a substantial effect size ( R2=0.27). Pearson's r resulted in a significant, strong and positive correlation between EI and Self-leadership (r(1)=.52, p=.0001). When the 8 components of Self-Leadership were broken out, the result was significant (p=.00795) and with a substantial effect size (R2=0.38). However, only Clarity had a significant p value (p=.01386).




## Discussion

The most encouraging implication of this study is that coaching EI in the sport and athletic context specifically using the principles of IFS may enhance Emotional Intelligence in athletes. As components of self-leadership often overlap with components of emotional intelligence, the benefit of developing and enhancing Self-leadership may enhance emotional intelligence in a sport and athletic context. Sport teams, coaches and sporting organizations should consider providing their teams and athletes with emotional intelligence coaching using the principles of Internal Family Systems, as research has shown that increasing emotional intelligence enhances athletic performance, team cohesion and application of mental skills. The potential of such IFS based EI coaching and training has not been tested with high level athletes, teams, coaches and organizations. Its implementation more widely would provide the opportunity to assess the effectiveness of this method of coaching EI in a sport context

A next recommended step: IFS be used as an intervention with rugby players with any intervention being examined in a research setting to determine any effect of IFS enhancing Self-Leadership has on an increase Emotional Intelligence, now that it is known they are positively correlated.

## Conclusions

Based on the results of this study, Emotional Intelligence has a significant, positive and substantial correlation on Self-leadership as described in the IFS model, in a team sport context. These results are consistent with the results in Esen & Balut (2022). This is not generally surprising, given the amount of research which indicates that emotions and sports go hand in hand. The results further this study's objective to determine if using the principles of Internal Family Systems (IFS), which promotes Self-Leadership, is an effective way to impart and train ability Emotional Intelligence in a sport/athletic context. The results of this study support using IFS principles to train or coach EI skills in a sport/athletic context. However, as only one sport, rugby, was included in this study, it is unable to be determined by the results are generalizable to other team sports, or to individual sport athletes. When broken down into the eight characteristics of Self-leadership (confidence, clarity, connectedness, calm, curiosity, compassion, courage and creativity) it appears that the calculation was underpowered with only 49 participants, with only clarity being significant. This is curious, and with the researcher bias, it could be speculated that if a larger sample size could be obtained, it could be hypothesized that more individual correlations would become apparent. I would hypothesize that courage, confidence and calm/composure would be the next of the individual Self-leadership components to become significant with rugby athletes. Could this indicate that clarity, the ability to know what needs to be done in any given situation, might be the most general capacity of Self-leadership? Clarity being an overall awareness.

## References

For a complete list of references see:

https://innerdynamicathletics.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/EISLS-Research-Article-3-July-1-revised-for-website.pdf

# Music Performance Anxiety in Musicians: Evaluation of an Internal Family Systems-Based Workshop

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## Theoretical Background

- Prevalence of performance anxiety: 90% [1] → impairs performance and quality of life, increases the risk of depression & anxiety [2]
- Core factors of MPA: maladaptive perfectionism, excessive self-criticism, low musical self-efficacy [3, 4]
- No adequate interventions available [5]
- IFS (Internal Family Systems) strengthens self-compassion, enables unblending from inner parts & has first evidence for the reduction of anxiety and stress, but no studies in the music context [6]

- **Research question**: Can IFS make a new contribution to a more functional way of dealing with MPA? Does IFS address perfectionism, self-criticism and self-efficacy?
- **Hypothesis 1**: The IFS workshop will be experienced as positive and subjectively useful by the majority of participants and will be recommended to others
- **Hypothesis 2**: MPA is significantly reduced after the IFS workshop (short-term and follow-up)
- **Hypothesis 3**: Participants in the IFS intervention report significantly higher musical self-efficacy and a more functional way of relating to inner critical voices after the workshop
- **Hypothesis 4:** Participants in the IFS workshop report a stronger decrease in MPA scores than the control-group workshop with ACT

## Methods

- Study design: pre, post and follow-up (after 4 weeks)
- Quasi-experimental design with 3 groups: experimental group (IFS, *n* = 33), control group (ACT, *n* = 37), waitlist group (*n* = 33); aged between 18 and 75 years (*N* = 103 recruited; final analysis sample *n* = 66)
- Predominantly symphonic wind orchestras at intermediate amateur level
- Multilevel models with MPA, self-criticism and musical self-efficacy as factors

Measures:

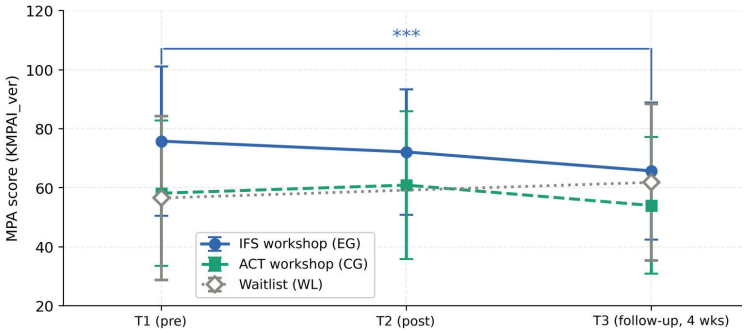
| Construct | Instrument (German version) | Items – scale |
|---|---|---|
| **MPA** | KMPAI-ver (modified subscales) | 7-point Likert |
| **Self-criticism** | FSCRS (hated self, inadequate self, reassured self) | 5-point Likert |
| **Musical self-efficacy** | Ritchie & Williamon (2011) | 7-point Likert |
| **General well-being** | WHO-5 (German) | 6-point Likert |
| **Acceptability evaluation** | Self-developed Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree – 7 = strongly agree) | 7-point Likert |

Intervention:

| Workshop | Duration | Core techniques |
|---|---|---|
| **IFS (EG)** | 2.5 h | **Mapping + Unblending** |
| **ACT (CG)** | 2 h | **Psychoeducation**, values clarification, mindfulness, metaphors (e.g. "Feeding the anxiety tiger", "Tug of war with anxiety monster") |

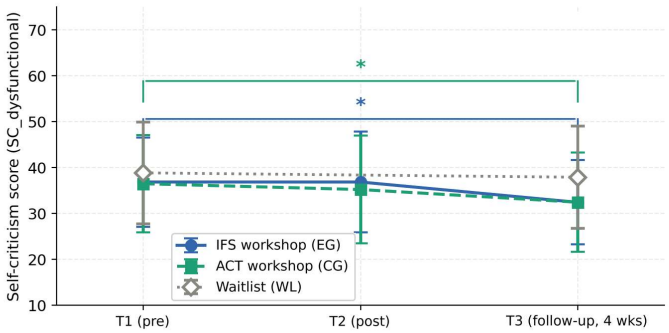
## Results

Figure 1: Course of MPA scores across the three measurement points



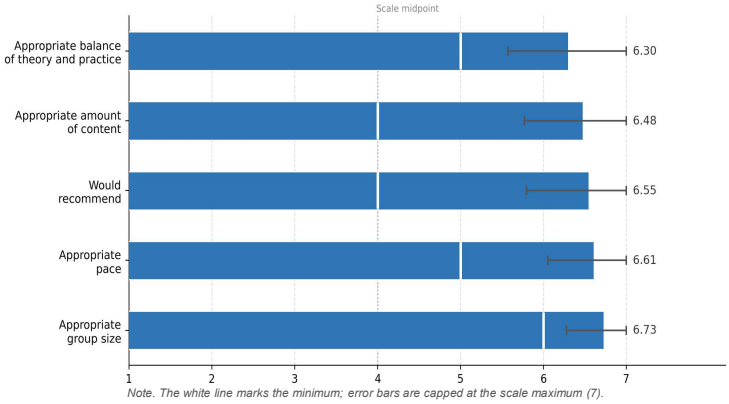

*Note. Values shown are uncorrected means (±1 SD). WL: no T2 measurement point.*
**** p < .001 (EG: T1→T3, t(129) = 3.53, d = 0.62).*

Figure 2: Course of dysfunctional self-criticism across the three measurement points




*Note. Values shown are uncorrected means (±1 SD). WL: no T2 measurement point.*
** p < .05 (EG: T1→T3, t(128) = 2.79, d = 0.49; CG: T1→T3, t(129) = 2.55, d = 0.45). No significant group difference.*

Figure 3: Results of the acceptability evaluation items




*Note. The white line marks the minimum; error bars are capped at the scale maximum (7).*

- Acceptability: all items *M* = 6.30–6.73 on a 7-point scale (EG, *n* = 33; Figure 3)
- MPA: significant reduction in the EG at follow-up only (*d* = 0.62) – not immediately post-workshop, and not in the CG or WL
- Musical self-efficacy: no specific intervention effect in any group
- Self-criticism: significant reduction at follow-up in the EG (*d* = 0.49) and the CG (*d* = 0.45), not in the WL; no group difference

## Conclusions

- High acceptability, subjective usefulness, high rate of recommendation
- Performance anxiety can be significantly reduced by a 2.5-hour IFS-based workshop – but the effect emerges only at follow-up, suggesting that short formats need time to unfold
- Compared with the control group, performance anxiety decreases more strongly in the EG (group difference at pre, regression to the mean?)
  - The IFS workshop focuses more on processes and less on specific symptoms – possible mechanism of change? [7]
- No significant effects were found for musical self-efficacy (neither in the EG nor the CG) → e.g. lack of mastery experiences
- Self-criticism decreased significantly in both workshop formats → neither format was superior

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# PAUSE for Practice

## Piloting an IFS-based Self-Leadership Training in a School-Based Violence Prevention Service in Hamburg, Germany

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### Why self-leadership in this setting?

Educational work can be emotionally demanding. CARE for Teachers improved adaptive emotion regulation and reduced psychological distress (Jennings et al., 2017). PAUSE brings IFS-informed self-leadership to professional relationships (Curry-Sartori, 2025). This pilot explores its reception in a specialized violence prevention service for professionals consistently exposed to violence, crises and high-stress situations.

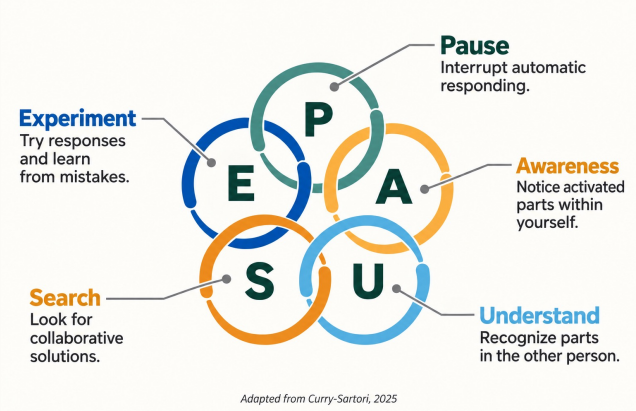
### The Hamburg pilot

**Participants:** Multidisciplinary staff participated, including service leadership.
**Aim:** explore acceptance, perceived professional relevance, and cultural adaptation.
**Design:** exploratory single-group pre–post study with post-training evaluation.

### Training and study design

### PAUSE in professional practice

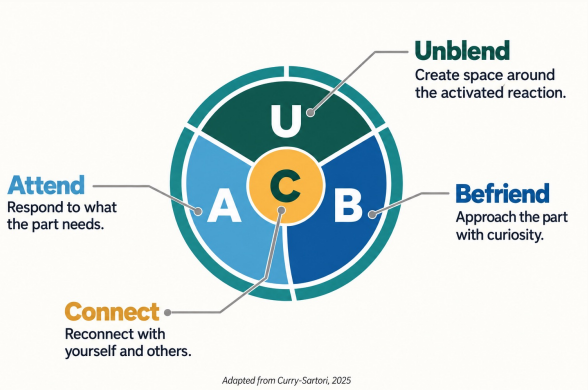
An IFS-informed five-step mnemonic for moving from automatic reactions toward more reflective, connected responses.




*Adapted from Curry-Sartori, 2025*

### U-BAC: The Inward Step

A process for working with activated parts within yourself.




*Adapted from Curry-Sartori, 2025*

### Generally favorable evaluations

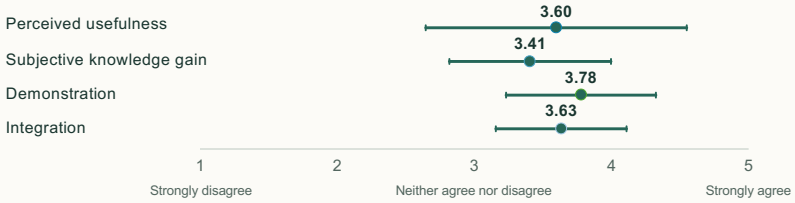
Participants generally rated PAUSE as useful and reported subjective learning. Instructional demonstration received the highest mean rating among the four highlighted dimensions.

Together, these evaluations provide an encouraging starting point for further implementation and cultural adaptation.

Descriptive TEI domain averages
Training outcomes: M = 3.70
Training design: M = 3.56

**Figure 1**

*Selected TEI Subscale Means and Standard Deviations*




Note. TEI = Training Evaluation Inventory, n = 18. Dots represent means. Horizontal lines show ±1 SD. Four of 10 subscales are highlighted. Domain averages are descriptive item composites. No normative benchmark is implied. These findings reflect participant evaluations and do not establish changes in professional behavior or mental health.

### Illustrative participant feedback

Summarized responses described unblending as helpful in crisis conversations and a shared parts language as useful for reflecting on triggers and team communication. These examples illustrate experience. They are not representative estimates of benefit.

### What this pilot can tell us

The findings support further study of participant acceptance and perceived usefulness. The small sample, self-report, and absence of a control group limit conclusions. This poster reports verified TEI descriptives. Analyses of other collected pre–post measures remain unverified.

### Next: implementation and cultural fit

Six optional deepening sessions have taken place. The planned focus group will examine everyday use, barriers, and adaptation needs. Future studies should test implementation and possible mechanisms, alongside professional and mental health outcomes.

**Positive participant evaluations are a valuable starting point. Translating IFS beyond therapy requires understanding how it fits professional practice and organizational culture.**

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Curry-Sartori, J. (2025). The self-led educator: An IFS-inspired guide to create calm, compassionate, and confident learning communities. PESI Publishing.

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