

## **Executive presence: Myth, meaningful or mastery?**

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**Abstract:** Executive presence is a theme that has been increasing in popularity over the last ten to fifteen years. As fascinating as the concept appears to be, there remains much confusion as to the nature of what executive presence truly represents. Is it trainable? Is it not trainable? Is it a so-called ‘x-factor’ in leadership? Is it something leaders are born with or can it be developed? Leaders and management consultants are debating these questions in the boardroom and in the classroom. Scholars and academic practitioners generally agree that executive presence can increase leadership effectiveness, widen leaders’ spheres of influence, and can be a career “game changer”. While some experts feel that executive presence relates to character, substance and style, others contend that it is connected to appearance, communication and “gravitas”. This paper could add clarity to the ongoing question of whether executive presence is merely a myth, if it is meaningful to practitioners and scholars, and if it eventually could make leaders masterful in their roles.

**INTRODUCTION** Executive presence (EP) is a topic that is increasing in popularity (Cappelli & Hamori, 2005; Groysberg, Kelly & MacDonald, 2011). It has been defined as “the ability to master perceptions” (Crittenden, 2013, p.10); and as “the ability to exude authenticity, competence, and emotional intelligence” (Long, 2011, p. 14). Executive presence has been referred to as “the X factor” in leadership (Bates & Weighart, 2015, p.41), while others define executive presence as an amalgam of qualities that true leaders exude, culminating in an aura that telegraphs you are in charge – or deserve to be (Hewlett, Leader-Chivée, Sherbin, Gordon & Dieudonné, 2012). The myriad definitions have added confusion, not clarity. Over the past ten years, EP has gained interest from researchers seeking to identify its characteristics, and how leaders leverage it to produce positive business outcomes (Edmonson & Asturi, 2015; De Haan, 2015). This paper deals with the research question (RQ), What does it mean to have executive presence? Along with the primary RQ, this paper also addresses secondary questions such as “What do C-level executives think executive presence means?” and How can C-level executives develop executive presence? Moreover, this research explores other questions like: How is executive presence trainable? How is it non-trainable? What intangibles comprise executive presence? EP is important because it can help leaders become more influential and persuasive in their roles and assist them in exuding higher levels of self-esteem and self-confidence (Long, 2011; Bates & Weighart, 2015). Taken together, these factors can propel executives to influence their staff through increased levels of employee engagement (Avery, McKay, & Wilson, 2007), and by creating an environment in which staff members feel more empowered to innovate and create (Vessey, Barrett, Mumford, Johnson & Litwiller, 2014).

The intrigue of executive presence, as well as its connection to increased levels of employee engagement and leader confidence, is offset by an inability to pinpoint what constitutes EP. Although executive presence can be linked to existing streams of charismatic literature, the paucity of studies on this topic makes for an interesting focus of research. However, the current work on this subject does not lead to a convergent representation of EP’s characteristics. On the contrary, research indicates that EP contains a potpourri of characteristics that, although interesting, do not provide clarity on defining it (Beeson, 2014; Limardi, Morrison & Morrison, 2014; Dagley & Gaskin, 2014; Dagley, 2013; Benton, 2003). Is it a special type of confidence, a certain charisma, a magnetic personality *or* a combination of these qualities? This study examines three themes regarding qualities of EP: is it trainable, non-trainable, or does it consist of intangibles? This paper also seeks to explore whether executive presence is a myth or a meaningful construct, by conducting a qualitative study of C-suite executives. The purpose of the research is to find out what it means to have executive presence, what C-level leaders think executive presence means, and how or if EP can be developed.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The current literature on executive presence is not convergent as evidenced by the information and dimensions presented in *Table 1*. The definition of executive presence seems to depend on whom one asks. With such disparate opinions on executive presence, this study could resolve its unclear nature. Management

*Table 1:* **EP: Trainable, Non-trainable & Intangible**

Quality	Author/Citation	Dimension
Appearance	Hewlett <i>et al.</i> , 2012	Trainable
Communication	Williamson, 2011	Trainable
Style, Substance	Bates & Weighart, 2015	Trainable
Impression-based (physical features, reputation, status)	Dagley, 2013	
Seriousness of Purpose	Limardi <i>et al.</i> , 2014	Trainable
Focused Awareness	Limardi <i>et al.</i> , 2014	Trainable
Personal Connection	Limardi <i>et al.</i> , 2014	Trainable
Relationship Building	Limardi <i>et al.</i> , 2014	Trainable
Charisma	Bass, 1985; Bass, 1988; DuBrin, 2012	Non-trainable
Substance, Character	Bates & Weighart, 2015	Non-trainable
Evaluation-based (values-in-action, intellect, expertise)	Dagley, 2013	Non-trainable
Aura / “Swagger”	Williamson, 2011	Intangible
Self-confidence, self-esteem	Williamson, 2011; Hough, 2012; Crittenden, 2013	Intangible
Gravitas	Hewlett <i>et al.</i> , 2012	Intangible
“Je ne sais quoi”	Murray, 2013; Harding <i>et al.</i> , 2011	Intangible

consultants have pondered the question whether executive presence is “inborn” or acquired. People are born with traits, and those traits are not trainable. However, some research has indicated that leaders can *acquire* EP (Crittenden, 2013; Williamson, 2011). This paper isolates several themes that have emerged from the literature on EP. This section will address three of these themes: trainable qualities, non-trainable traits, and “intangibles.”

**Trainable qualities.** Are the qualities associated with executive presence trainable? The American Heritage Dictionary defines trainable as “to make proficient through specialized instruction or practice.” Trainable qualities are those characteristics that training and development programs can enhance or make better and are summarized in *Table 2*. For years, management consultants have pondered this question of trainable versus non-trainable. Author and consultant Sally Williamson affirms that EP could represent an *aura* or *swagger*, or an “it factor”. She asserts that you *can* train executive presence—it is not an inborn characteristic (Williamson, 2011). For many years, people believed presence to be a God-given trait. Training departments did not believe its employees could coach or develop leaders in presence. You were either a born leader or you were not. In Williamson’s (2011) research into the effectiveness of 400 CEOs, C-level executives, corporate communications executives, and professional development managers, almost all the participants viewed executive presence as an essential component of their roles, and most subjects believe that EP *can indeed be acquired*.

The relevant aspects of the trainable qualities of executive presence are seen in a variety of recent studies (e.g. Hewlett *et al.*, 2012; Bates & Weighart, 2015; Dagley, 2013; Dagley & Gaskin, 2014; Limardi *et al.*, 2014). One study has provided definitions that center around three distinct aspects: authority-

based components, appearance-based components, and trust-based components.

The authors identified the following three higher-order features of executive presence: appearance, communication, and *gravitas* (Hewlett, Leader-Chivée, Sherbin, Gordon & Dieudonné 2012). Their respondents (268 senior

executives) did not give these characteristics identical weight, with *gravitas* having 67% support (as “the most important” characteristic), followed by *communication* (28%) and then *appearance* (5%). The authors consider executive presence to be one of the three central characteristics of an effective leader, the other two being “authenticity” and the “ability to deliver substantive results” (Hewlett *et al.*, 2012).

Three dimensions form the basis of The Bates Model of Executive Presence: style, character, and substance; style and substance are considered “trainable” qualities. *Style* consists of appearance, intentionality, inclusiveness, interactivity, and assertiveness, whereas *substance* includes executive essentials like composure, confidence, resonance, and vision. They assert that 40% of new executive hires fail *within the first 18 months* due to interpersonal style issues and general tactlessness that strain relationships. Nevertheless, when leaders focus on aspects of presence and influence and act on them, then it is far more likely that they maintain sustainable presence. Consequently, they can more readily adapt as challenges present themselves. The authors even contend that every leader can bolster facets of EP through ongoing coaching,

**Table 2: EP: Trainable Qualities**

Trainable Quality	Citation
Appearance	Hewlett <i>et al.</i> , 2012
Communication	Williamson, 2011
Style, Substance	Bates & Weighart, 2015
Impression-based (physical appearance/grooming, reputation, status)	Dagley, 2013
Seriousness of Purpose	Limardi <i>et al.</i> , 2014
Focused Awareness	Limardi <i>et al.</i> , 2014
Personal Connection	Limardi <i>et al.</i> , 2014
Relationship Building	Limardi <i>et al.</i> , 2014

mentoring, action learning, team development, and leadership programs. Once again, this signifies an example of advocacy for executive presence’s characteristics being trainable.

Limardi’s model of executive presence offers a more relationship-driven approach than does the Bates Model. His **four** main trainable characteristics of EP are seriousness of purpose; ability to forge relationships built on trust, strong personal connection, and focused awareness (Limardi *et al.*, 2014). Seriousness of purpose means that leaders with executive presence tend to generate a perception that others should follow them (Limardi *et al.*, 2014). They possess a weightiness of purpose that they express in their words and body language. Forging contacts based on trust translates to leaders being experts in developing relationships built on mutual dependence and authenticity in communicating and keeping a promise. Being able to make strong personal connections means leaders know how to draw people in, and then sustain that connection (Limardi *et al.*, 2014). Focused awareness equals being present, fully engaged, and attentive to the needs of others. The authors suggest that leaders should spend considerable time meditating on the topic (EP) and evaluate how they are perceived by others and their personal connection to the core characteristics with the intention to maximize their ability to influence and motivate others (Limardi *et al.*, 2014).

**Non-trainable traits.** In addition to trainable qualities, there also exist non-trainable traits. These traits represent characteristics that make one person different from another (The American Heritage Dictionary, 2015). Traits may refer to phenotypic qualities, in biology, for example, which involve genes and characteristics of organisms. Since traits are hereditary, non-trainable traits are qualities that training and development programs cannot influence. These include, but are not limited to, charisma, (substance) character, and evaluation-based characteristics like values-in-action, intellect, expertise, and are included in

Table 3:

EP: Non-trainable Traits	
Non-trainable Trait	Citation
Charisma	Bass, 1985; Bass, 1988; DuBrin, 2012
Substance, Character	Bates & Weighart, 2015
Evaluation-based (values-in-action, intellect, expertise)	Dagley, 2013

Table 3. The dilemma with the data presented in Table 3 is that ‘substance’ is again included as a non-trainable trait. There appears to be disagreement over the grouping of attributes and traits often associated with executive presence (Bates & Weighart, 2015). This paper could offer further clarity on the matter of EP’s trainable qualities vs. non-trainable traits.

Charismatic leadership has been at the heart of organizational effectiveness and linked to aspects of executive presence. Bass (1988) expounds and builds on Conger and Kanungo’s notion that charisma consists of three broad theoretical perspectives: charisma is a personal attribute; charisma is part of a social relationship; and charisma is part of organizational behavior. Bass emphasizes the behavioral components of charismatic leadership. The first perspective relies on the behaviors of leaders and followers. The second (institutional) perspective is concerned with the institutionalization of charisma – how do charismatic leaders affect social changes based on their actions? Even though elements of executive presence have been associated with the charisma literature (Judge *et al.*, 2006), EP remains a vague concept (Long, 2011; Dagley, 2013). Some of the traits associated with a charismatic leader are the same as those linked to leaders who possess executive presence. This study can help zero in on those qualities that are trainable, and those traits that are not trainable, in order to provide greater clarity about executive presence.

Executive presence is more than *just* having “charisma,” looking “sharp” or exhibiting good presentation skills. EP is also about character, which consists of attributes like authenticity,

integrity and humility. Research shows character is foundational to inspiring trust, goodwill and credibility (Walumbwa, Luthans & Avey, 2011; Green & Cooper, 2012; Martínez & del Bosque, 2013). However, assessing character does not indicate whether leaders possess leadership attributes like humility, resonance or concern, only whether others see it and experience it. If people see leaders' character in action, then they may want to follow them.

**Intangibles.** There is a growing contingent of individuals who advocate that the intangibles (see *Table 4*) mean more to executives than trainable qualities or non-trainable traits. They avow that executive presence is not just confined to charismatic leadership; rather, it is tied to the “intangibles” – what is referred to as the “it” or “wow factor” (Harding, Lee, Ford & Learmonth, 2011; Williamson, 2011; Hough, 2012; Crittenden, 2013). Scholars regard *gravitas*, or the ability to be taken seriously, as an “intangible” characteristic (Hewlett *et al.*, 2012); so are qualities like aura and swagger. These attributes are similar to self-confidence and ‘je ne sais quoi’ that “...will have a disarming impact upon followers regardless of gender” (Harding *et al.*, 2011).

**Table 4:**

EP: Intangible Characteristics	
Intangible Characteristic	Citation
Aura, “Swagger”	Williamson, 2011
Self-confidence, self-esteem	Williamson, 2011; Hough, 2012; Crittenden, 2013
Gravitas	Hewlett <i>et al.</i> , 2012
“Je ne sais quoi”	Murray, 2013; Harding <i>et al.</i> , 2011

Managers who lack this certain ‘irresistible something’ can give out tasks but cannot influence and persuade their followers on physical presence/demeanor alone. Researchers argue that intangible characteristics like *gravitas* and ‘je ne sais quoi’ are difficult to measure (Murray, 2013). Subsequently, our concentration in this study will be on trainable characteristics of executive presence, although future studies in the executive management literature can concentrate on the impact of intangibles in shaping EP.

**Criticisms of executive presence.** Not all literature provides an endorsement for executive presence. Thus far, this research paper has addressed executive presence in the context of predominantly *male* leaders. One of the criticisms levied against EP is that scholars discuss it as a “male-centered” construct. In fact, some researchers have suggested that women struggle more than men do with executive presence (Carpenter, 2013; Dagley & Gaskin, 2014). They even contend that a company’s culture might hold women to a stricter code of behavior than men and might punish women more for deviations from that code. Feedback women obtain on the level of their executive presence is often contradictory and confusing (Crittenden, 2013a; Carpenter, 2013). To illustrate this point, in 2012, *Marie Claire*, American Express and Goldman Sachs jointly sponsored a project that the Center for Talent Innovation conducted, led by its founder and career guru, Sylvia Ann Hewlett. The study revealed that in addition to common leadership attributes like “vision” and “decisiveness”, leaders also judge women by qualities such as “hairstyle” and “tone of voice” (*Marie Claire*, 2012).

In addition to male vs. female-centered attributes, certain scholars have drawn a distinction between leadership and presence. In other words, effective leadership causes people to act; effective executive presence causes people to listen (Dagley, 2013). The author arrived at this assertion by studying a group of 34 leaders, consultants and HR professionals who completed structured interviews in which they described people who have different forms of executive presence. They replied to a validation study that authenticated the major findings from the interview analysis that highlighted the distinction above. In addition, the author concluded that



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executive presence can change over time and he underscored ten characteristics that he identified and grouped under two headings: impression-based characteristics and evaluation-based characteristics. Impression-based qualities encompass status and reputation, physical features, demeanor, communication skills, and interpersonal skills while evaluation-based qualities comprise interpersonal behavior patterns, values-in-action, intellect and expertise, outcome delivery ability, and power use (Dagley, 2013).

It is also important to distinguish between “executive charisma”, “presence” and “executive presence”. Executive charisma is “the ability to gain effective responses from others by using aware actions and considerate civility in order to get useful things done” (Benton, 2003: 132). Presence consists of “the ability to authentically connect, captivate, motivate, collaborate, and inspire others through flexible, value-centered communications and leadership,” whereas presence could be thought of as “the ability to comfortably draw and hold attention while delivering a “business”-savvy message (Benton, 2003: p.125).

**Executive presence and charismatic leadership.** Perhaps, executive presence constitutes an amalgam of charismatic and transformational leadership methodologies as suggested by some writers (Hewlett *et al.*, 2012; Medalla, 2013), or quite simply a hodgepodge of other “magnetic” attributes described in this section. Certain scholars have concluded that from 1978-1993, a new genre of leadership theory, alternatively referred to as "charismatic," "transformational," "visionary," or "inspirational," has emerged in the organizational literature (House, 1977; Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985). Unfortunately, the literature on charismatic leadership does not provide an explanation of the process by which charismatic leadership has its profound effects. As this research points out, since 2000, the literature on executive presence has yielded a wide array of disparate views. Although scholars link EP to charismatic qualities, no motivational explanations are provided to explain how charismatic leaders bring about changes in followers' values, goals, needs and aspirations (Shamir, House & Arthur, 1993); experts have leveled a similar criticism against EP (Dagley & Gaskin, 2014). This research remedies this gap by indicating the effects of leaders' executive presence on their spheres of influence.

## METHODOLOGY

**Methodology (What).** The researchers will employ a case study approach utilizing semi-structured interviews. Case studies allow the group to explore the single case of executive presence within this specific sample of the firms' employees. Although Stake (2005) asserts that a case study is not a methodology, Creswell (2013) argues that it is, as it represents a type of design that may be both an object of the study and a product of the inquiry. This study begins with identifying the specific case, which, for this paper, consists of a small grouping of executives and leaders from the medical and transportation industries. Instrumental cases such as this allow the researchers to explore a concept and best address how to develop it (Creswell, 2013). The drawback of a case study utilizing semi-structured interviews is that it relies on a single source of data; however, reflection and utilization of another DBA researcher in the coding process is a form of triangulation and can help to mitigate this challenge.

**Case study (How).** The team of researchers will conduct semi-structured interviews in order to examine the phenomenon of executive presence. A semi-structured interview combines elements of structured and unstructured techniques, and researchers leverage it in exploratory cases like this study when researchers cannot predict answers or assume outcomes to questions. A semi-structured interview requires a script (see Appendix) and calls for an awareness of unstructured techniques to elaborate and draw information, impressions, feelings, attitudes, from

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the participants. The researchers will inform the participants of the purpose for the study, and the latter will have the opportunity to opt out.

**Bias & limitations.** Researcher bias is prevalent in any study – qualitative or quantitative. Bias may stem from the selection of the sample and researchers' personal worldviews. In an effort to reduce such selection bias, the research team agreed to have a staff member from the Human Resources' office select the final sample from the volunteer pool of respondents. This research study did not use incentives in the recruiting process. Although postmodern functionalist might consider that the investigator is free from relaying one's own values and interpretations onto others and into the research study (Ardalan, 2012), the reality is that each researcher might bring a worldview into any research endeavor. These researchers could consider the preconceived ideas and thoughts that can bias this qualitative research.

The limitations of this paper include sample specificity, researcher bias, and an absence of cultural context. With the sample coming from separate institutions, the study's findings may be generalizable to other similar industries and may indeed extend to other management and executive populations. In addition, researchers only queried a small sampling of the subjects (ten). Researcher bias may also have been a factor in this study. Researchers used memo-ing to reflect and indicate any preconceived thoughts or judgments concerning the research question and research topic, and thereby engage in the process of reflexivity to mitigate bias (Creswell, 2013). The responses from the subjects should vary, but it is possible to group the data into three categories: style, character and substance. The findings could contribute to the literature by broadening the theoretical streams that concern the C-suite and leadership development. Based on the results of this paper, although the cumulative tradition of EP is limited, this qualitative study could serve to establish a more unified framework that synthesizes important themes associated with executive presence.

**Data collection, coding & analysis.** The team will consist of several PhD/DBA student researchers who will take notes during the interviews, transcribe data after the interviews, and audio tape the proceedings if allowed by the organizations, and take place between July 15, 2019 and October 1, 2019. The researchers will be instructed to dress appropriately (business attire) and make appointments with all interviewees. Then, the team will analyze, sort and code the data. The researchers conducting the interviews will not engage in the coding process. They will categorize and analyze the data to determine if they are in concert with each other, and two people will code every interview. The researchers will list all the codes of a type, and subsequently will sort by code/sub-code; then, they will count the number of times each code/sub-code occurs. The PhD/DBA student researchers will then identify important topics or themes and categorize the codes under that topic or theme. After re-sorting, they will then diagram the data to ensure that what they have synthesized makes sense.

Afterwards, the coders will engage in a discussion to discern which themes emerge. Based upon the recommendations of Eisenhardt (1989), we envision that the team of researchers will spend a considerable amount of time in sharing perspectives and ideas to arrive at a consensus. Since there will be multiple coders, it will be necessary to perform inter-rater reliability assessments to ensure they are coding the information in a faithful and consistent manner. This will ensure that the proper rigors are in place to produce valid data (Armstrong, Gosling, Weinman & Marteau, 1997).

At that point, a knowledgeable team of Ph.D. employees from the organization will review the procedures and data, and in addition, the researchers will randomly select a cross-section of participants to inspect the findings in order to increase the reliability factor. The researchers will

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then examine contradictions to decipher if anything proves to be inconsistent within the data collected. The source of these contradictions could be the observer/researcher, participant or theory, and as the DBA student researchers identify incongruities, they may take them to a third party for further explanation.

Responses will be coded using descriptive, thematic, and process schemes, seeking to understand both the context of and approaches to executive presence by the study's respondents:

**Attribute:** Defines characteristics of the object of interest (executive presence), e.g. polished public speaker, commanding stature, physical demeanor, authentic, etc.

**Descriptive:** The characteristics of the interviewee, their role/responsibilities, the business environment in which they work, circumstances surrounding the interview, observed behaviors (engaged, not engaged, interested, not interested, etc.), and noticeable individual differences characteristics will be documented, thereby allowing for a variety of content synopses and groupings of similar characteristics.

**Thematic:** Interviewee's answers will be broken down into phrases or sentences and then coded to identify the core meaning of individual units of data analysis pertaining to EP, e.g. "physical appearance," "communication," "aura," etc. Codes will emerge from the data rather than the researchers determining them in advance, to limit researcher interpretive bias.

Throughout these various analytical steps, reflection will reveal areas needing further follow-up, either in the research literature or with interviewees. In addition, biases and differences of opinion will be uncovered. Further, researchers will identify supporting and contradictory data *and* interpretations. With the categorized and coded data, the researchers can perform a thematic content analysis through an inductive process in which the researchers will progress from categorization to abstraction, comparison, and integration as recommended by Spiggle (1994) and mimicked by Ordanini, Miceli, Pizzetti and Parasuraman (2011). Lastly, the team of researchers will engage in introspective self-reflexivity techniques that typify best practices for "excellent qualitative research" in order to minimize researcher biases and inclinations and to fulfill the criteria of "sincerity" (Tracy, 2010).

**Ethical considerations.** Any research project must consider ethical considerations. Participants in the study will be notified that their **participation is voluntary** (see email instructions below). This research poses no more risk than normal classroom risks. The researchers will send each participant a brief instructional email outlining the parameters of the study, ensuring anonymity of responses, voluntary participation, and the length of interviews. The email will provide details that the researchers will collect data in such a manner that does not identify any individual. The instructions indicated how to contact the researcher or representative with any questions pertaining to the study. This email will also contain what is referred to as informed consent. Lastly, the researchers collected the necessary approvals for the research project and methods.

## **RESULTS (Ongoing)**

As of this writing (late August 2019), ten individuals have been interviewed, out of a possible 25 persons. The individuals' titles range from VP to individual contributor. The researchers selected individuals at random, who happened to respond to an email inquiry requesting assistance with a human resources-related project. Of the ten individuals who completed the interview process, three hold the title of VP, three hold the title of Director, two hold the title of Manager, and one holds the title of Analyst (Individual Contributor). Of the remaining 15 persons to be

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interviewed, five hold Director titles, three hold Manager titles, and seven hold various titles that amount to “Individual Contributor” status – nurse (2), analyst (2), HR specialist, finance specialist, and business coach. To re-emphasize, the primary researcher stressed that participation in the research project was strictly voluntary.

From the responses to date, the primary researcher compiled the responses into five unique categories: Physical appearance, Intangibles, Authenticity, Communication, and Relationships. The following diagram represents an incomplete breakdown of the responses from the ten individuals:

**Table 5: Categories of Executive Presence Based on Individual Interviews**

Physical Appearance	“Intangibles”	Authenticity	Communication	Relationships
Height/Tall (3)	Aura (4)	Authentic (3)	Polished speaker (6)	Builds bridges (3)
Good-looking (2)	“ <i>Je ne sais quoi</i> ” (2) – “I don’t know what)	Transparent (2)	Good vocabulary (2)	Disarms people (3)
Dresses well (5)		Integrity (2)	Persuasive (2)	Makes connections easily (4)
		Character (3)		

**Table 6: Additional Responses and Descriptive Words/Phrases**

Additional Descriptive Words or Phrases		
GQ	Smart	“Cool cucumber”
Well-mannered	Intelligent	Grace under pressure
Smells good	Degreed professional	Gravitas
Well-coiffed	Relaxed	Sociopolitical savvy

**Table 7: How Can Executives Develop Executive Presence?**

Key Words or Phrases	
Training (1)	Leadership Seminars—External (2)
Coaching (1)	Observing Others (1)
Finding a Mentor (2)	
Leadership Classes—Internal (2)	

## DISCUSSION

**Analysis.** Although the entirety of the research has not been completed, some key themes have emerged. Primarily, the researchers have observed five distinct categories comprised of: physical appearance, intangibles, authenticity, communication, and relationships. These categories are important, because they represent guideposts that demonstrate if previous research is convergent or divergent with respect to the attributes that characterize Executive Presence.

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In the category of Physical Appearance, subjects most often remarked that an individual who “dresses well” is characteristic of someone who possesses Executive Presence. In addition, height and being good-looking also are emblematic of individuals who exhibit Executive Presence. Similarly, in the category of Intangibles, subjects remarked that having an aura or possessing a certain “je ne sais quoi” or implacable quality means that an individual has Executive Presence. Those surveyed also stated that being authentic and a person of good moral character and integrity characterizes Executive Presence. Being an excellent and polished communicator, who can be persuasive, is also indicative of one who possesses Executive Presence. Finally, the fifth category of being adept at building Relationships is also important for subjects, who noted that the art of building relationships is paramount when building Executive Presence.

From the subjects’ responses, the primary researcher has uncovered that a blend of both cognitive intelligence (IQ) and emotional intelligence (EQ) are essential to Executive Presence, which supports data completed by Goleman (1995, 1997) indicating both IQ and EQ are necessary for leadership effectiveness. Participants noted “degreed professional”, “smart”, and “intelligent” as key characteristics in addition to EQ-related traits like “relationship building”, “grace under pressure”, and “sociopolitical savvy”. The apparent linkage between these responses could lead to future research exploring the necessity to possess both IQ and EQ in order to demonstrate optimal leadership effectiveness. Another key finding is the association between physical appearance and Executive Presence. Of those surveyed to date, all indicated at least one pleasing physical quality that could indicate higher levels of Executive Presence. Finally, with a small sample size of ten individuals, the data reveals most subjects assert that training, coaching, or a focus on leadership development skills can elevate Executive Presence.

## **SUMMARY**

This study serves to explore the following three themes of executive presence: trainable characteristics, non-trainable traits, and “intangibles”. These themes will be subjective attitudinal measures. Trainable characteristics are qualities that can be acquired through learning and development, whereas non-trainable traits cannot be acquired through formal learning and development techniques and are considered “inborn.” Intangibles consist of facets unclear to the mind such as aura, the “it” or “wow” factors (Williamson, 2011; Limardi *et al.*, 2014). Because only partial data have been collected for reasons outlined earlier in this paper, the researchers anticipate a continued wide range of responses collected from the participants, but could fit into one of the three categories: character, substance, and style. These three dimensions figure prominently in the Executive Presence Model of Bates Communications (2019), which presently serves as the only statistically validated model on the market, represented by the Bates ExPI™ questionnaire.

The purpose of this qualitative research study is to examine what executive presence means and how leaders can develop EP from various perspectives – executive and non-executive alike. Each stream, or viewpoint, offers a narrow understanding of a topic that has received much attention in the academic literature over the last ten to fifteen years (Cappelli & Hamori, 2005; Beeson, 2012a; Medalla, 2013; Limardi *et al.*, 2014). The researchers explored several key questions: 1) *What does it mean to have executive presence?* 2) *IQ1: What do C-level Executives and other employees think executive presence means?* and 3) *IQ2: How can leaders develop executive presence?* There appears to be an absence of a uniting theoretical lens through which the academic and business communities can strengthen their perceptions of executive presence.

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Executive presence represents an intriguing field for scholars. Business executives, scholar practitioners, and executive coaches acknowledge its role in shaping the success of leaders (Hale, 2018; Sanford & Janney, 2019). This research is important because it holds managerial and academic practitioner implications. For the manager, there is research supporting the creation of senior leader development programs that could help build leaders' executive presence to fuel workplace engagement (Avery *et al.*, 2007). Based on the subjects' agreement that a mix of IQ and EQ are integral in developing Executive Presence, future studies could focus on how these two constructs intertwine in the workplace. Moreover, new research can build on studies that seem to suggest leadership and executive presence play a role in sparking innovation and creativity in the work environment (Vessey *et al.*, 2014). Future research should benefit by resolving the gap between the predominant male-centered attributes of executive presence, and female-centered qualities (Carpenter, 2013; Dagley & Gaskin, 2014). In addition, future studies should concentrate on further clarifying the line between effective *leadership* and effective *executive presence* (Dagley, 2013). Organizations that use this research should be able to leverage the findings to develop programs that can help executives develop and exercise EP in the workplace.

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## APPENDIX

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## **APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

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## INTERVIEW PROTOCOL (Creswell, 2013)

Dr. Emmanuel V. Dalavai, Interview Protocol: *Executive Presence*

Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_

Time/Date of Interview: \_\_\_\_\_

Interview Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewee Demographics: \_\_\_\_\_

(Researchers set up the study and welcome the participants. Then, they reaffirm that the respondents' answers will be kept confidential. Researchers inquire if they can make an audio recording of the proceedings. They ask if the participants are willing to review the researchers' notes upon completion to verify completeness. Then, upon completion of the final version of the draft paper, the researchers offer to share it with the subjects for feedback and enhancement).

### ***What does it mean to have executive presence?***

*Explanation prompts: Allure, aura, sophisticated self-presentation, articulate and conversational*

### ***What do C-level executives and employees think executive presence means?***

*Elaboration prompts: Better decision-making, staff development, and enabling vision casting.*

### ***How can C-level Executives and other leaders develop executive presence?***

*Elaboration prompts: Training, experience, coaching*

*Can you give me an example of how your company helps you develop executive presence?*

*Elaboration prompts: Training & development, Leadership Academy, subscriptions to journals*

### ***How is executive presence trainable? Non-trainable?***

*Explanation prompts:*

### ***What intangibles comprise executive presence?***

*Explanation prompts:*

### ***What are the effects of leaders' executive presence on their staff members and peers?***

*Explanation prompts:*

**(Extend thanks to the interviewees for their participation. Reconfirm anonymity of responses & agree on next steps)**

*(Researcher will record personal assessment of each interviewee's apparent expression of attitudes, impressions and feelings based on interaction with subject).*

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