

Leaders who can read the crowd do better

April 20 2015, by Terry Kosdrosky

Performers call it "reading the crowd" or "sizing up the audience."

However you put it, new research from University of Michigan professor Jeffrey Sanchez-Burks shows this skill, which he calls emotional aperture, isn't just important for performers. It can define your success as a [business leader](#).

He and a team of colleagues built on longstanding work in emotional intelligence research—the ability to read and react to people's emotions—and applied it to the collective setting relevant to business leaders.

"Leaders don't have the luxury of one-on-one meetings with all members of their organization, and we've overlooked the unique challenges and potential benefits of reading the emotional distribution of a team, unit, or a division," said Sanchez-Burks, professor of management and organizations at U-M's Ross School of Business.

In three studies, Sanchez-Burks and his colleagues show that business leaders better able to read the nonverbal emotional cues of a group are more successful in the eyes of their subordinates. They also showed that one's skill in reading individual emotional cues doesn't carry over to reading a crowd's.

The results will be published in an upcoming special edition of the journal *Cognition and Emotion*. Sanchez-Burks' co-authors are Laura Rees of Vanderbilt University, Caroline Bartel of the University of

Texas and Quy Huy of INSEAD Singapore.

To perform the studies, the team developed a test—the emotional aperture measure—that rates your ability to read collective emotions and allows you to learn how to adjust. The test is based on changes in facial expressions among groups of people.

It's a technique used in leadership training for Ross MBAs and in executive education.

"Many times, reasonable people in business try to hide their authentic emotional reactions to organizational events and a leader's message," Sanchez-Burks said. "But our research shows that good leaders are able to decode these fleeting micro facial expressions people are not good at controlling and adjust accordingly."

More information: "Assessing collective affect recognition via the Emotional Aperture Measure." *Cognition & Emotion* [DOI: 10.1080/02699931.2015.1015968](https://doi.org/10.1080/02699931.2015.1015968)

Take the test: [www.jeffreysanchezburks.com/bl ... /emotional-aperture/](http://www.jeffreysanchezburks.com/bl.../emotional-aperture/)

Provided by University of Michigan

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