Emotional Intelligence

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The term *emotional intelligence* was first used in a 1990 article by Peter Salovey and John D. Mayer that appeared in the journal, *Imagination, Cognition, and Personality*. Salovey and Mayer described emotional intelligence as a form of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one's thinking and action. They coined the term as a challenge to intelligence theorists to contemplate an expanded role for the emotional system in conceptual schemes of human abilities and to investigators of emotion who had historically considered the arousal of affect as disorganizing of cognitive activity. In the spirit of Charles Darwin, who in his 1872 book, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, viewed the emotional system as necessary for survival and as providing an important signaling system within and across species, Salovey and Mayer emphasized the functionality of feelings and described a set of competencies that might underlie the adaptive use of affectively-charged information.

**Associated Concepts and Formal Definition**

The idea of an emotional intelligence was anticipated, at least implicitly, by various theorists who argued that traditional notions of analytic intelligence are too narrow. Emotional intelligence adds an affective dimension to Robert Sternberg's work on practical intelligence, is consistent with theorizing by Nancy Cantor and John Kihlstrom about social intelligence, and is directly related to research on children's emotional competencies by Carolyn Saarni and others. Emotional intelligence is most similar to one of the multiple intelligences characterized by
Howard Gardner (1983) in *Frames of Mind*. Of the kinds of intelligence described by Gardner, *intrapersonal intelligence* is most similar to emotional intelligence. Gardner delineated intrapersonal intelligence as access to one's own feeling life and the capacity to effect discriminations among these feelings, label them, enmesh them in symbolic codes, and draw upon them as a mean of understanding and guiding one's behavior.

In a chapter titled *What is Emotional Intelligence?*, Mayer and Salovey (1997) described emotional intelligence more formally by outlining the specific competencies it encompasses. They organized these competencies along four branches including (a) the ability to perceive, appraise, and express emotion accurately; (b) the ability to access and generate feelings when they facilitate cognition; (c) the ability to understand affect-laden information and make use of emotional knowledge; and (d) the ability to regulate emotions to promote growth and well-being. Individuals can be more or less skilled at attending to, appraising, and expressing their own emotional states. These emotional states can be harnessed adaptively and directed toward a range of cognitive tasks including problem solving, creativity, and decision making. Emotional intelligence also includes essential knowledge about the emotional system; the most fundamental competencies at this level concern the ability to label emotions with words and to recognize the relationships among exemplars of the affective lexicon. Finally, emotional intelligence includes the ability to regulate feelings in oneself and in other people. Individuals who are unable to manage their emotions are more likely to experience negative affect and remain in poor spirits.

**Measuring Emotional Intelligence**

After the publication of a best-selling trade-book on the topic of emotional intelligence by *New York Times* science writer Daniel Goleman in 1995, the concept of emotional intelligence
gained enormous popular appeal and attracted considerable media attention. Attempts to operationalize and directly measure this construct were inevitable. Guided by the original framework of emotional intelligence, Salovey and Mayer initially examined the meta-, or reflective, experience of mood. Two self-report scales to assess meta-mood cognition (i.e., reflection on the experience of mood) have been employed: a trait scale and a state scale. The former, for example, is the 30-item Trait Meta-Mood Scale (TMMS), which taps into a people's beliefs about their propensity to attend with clarity to their own mood states and to engage in mood-repair. The items of this measure are straightforward, e.g., *I pay a lot of attention to how I feel* (Attention), *I can never tell how I feel* (Clarity, reverse-scored), and *I try to think good thoughts no matter how badly I feel* (Repair). The psychometric properties of this scale are quite good, and some empirical findings have been generated from the use of it. The TMMS, however, like other self-report measures of aspects of emotional intelligence such as the Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory (the EQ-i; Bar-On, 1997), essentially asks individuals whether or not they have various competencies and experiences consistent with being emotionally intelligent; it does not require individuals to demonstrate their emotional competencies. A more valid measure of core emotional intelligence likely requires a test that relies on tasks and exercises rather than on self-assessment. Such a performance-based instrument has not yet been published.

Although the construct of emotional intelligence has generated considerable interest, the measurement of it is emerging rather slowly, and validity data are especially scarce. There is a converging sense among researchers of what emotional intelligence is – a set of competencies concerning the appraisal and expression of feelings, the use of emotions to facilitate cognitive activities, knowledge about emotions, and the regulation of emotion. Yet, there is considerably less consensus on how best to measure emotional intelligence. Although the advantages of task-
based and behavioral assessment are mentioned above, various self-assessments have also appeared that may measure important aspects of individuals' perceptions of their competencies in this domain. Such self-assessments may or may not correlate with actual skills and abilities. Other self-tests that have been repackaged under the emotional intelligence rubric appear to have little to do with this construct.

Some validity work has appeared in the literature in recent years. For example, Reuven Bar-On (1997) reported that his measure, the EQ-i, differentiates U.S. Naval Academy students who feel personally successful from those who do not, Latina immigrants scoring high versus low on an acculturation scale, prisoners from non-prisoners, and the like. Predictive validity has been demonstrated with the TMMS scales, which seem to identify those individuals who are less likely to ruminate or report illnesses during stressful experiences (Goldman, Kraemer & Salovey, 1996; Salovey et al., 1995). Despite what has been learned about the measurement of emotional intelligence over the past few years, research on the psychometric properties, generally, and the validity, in particular, of most emotional intelligence tests is still in its adolescence.

**Emotional Intelligence in the Schools**

During the 1980s and 1990s, the idea that the social problems of young people – school dropout, illicit drug use, teenage pregnancy – can be addressed through school-based prevention programs became popular among educational reformers. Earlier programs focused primarily on social problem-solving skills or conflict resolving strategies, but more recently, and particularly after the attention paid to such programs in Goleman’s (1995) book, *Emotional Intelligence*, they have dealt with the emotions explicitly. For younger children, these programs focus on building a feelings vocabulary and recognizing facial expressions of emotion. Middle-school students
learn how to control their impulses and regulate feelings such as sorrow and anger. Those programs focused on high school students address the role of emotions in resisting peer pressure to engage in risky sexual behavior and drug or alcohol use. It is likely that these programs are helpful to students, and the evaluation research that has been conducted generally reveals that they are liked by participating students and teachers and that they can have an impact on social behavior, especially at school.

Challenges for the Future

Despite the popularization of the construct in the mid-1990s, empirical research on emotional intelligence is still in its infancy. The problematic issues in this area of work are not surprising, given the relative immaturity of this research domain. For one, the term emotional intelligence is used to represent various aspects of the human condition. Salovey and Mayer (1990) and other investigators prefer to focus narrowly on specific abilities and competencies concerned with appraising, understanding, and regulating emotions, and using them to facilitate cognitive activities. However, journalists writing for the general public like Goleman (1995) have defined emotional intelligence in terms of motivation (persistence, zeal), cognitive strategies (delay of gratification), and, even, character (being a good person). Emotional intelligence may contribute to persistence, delay, and character, but they are not one in the same thing. The con-artist may be especially skilled at reading and regulating the emotions of other people but may have little of what is commonly thought to be good character.

This area of research will not prove to be productive unless the abilities that make up emotional intelligence can be measured reliably and unless these abilities are related to important, real-world outcomes. It is likely that research using ability measures will reveal that
emotional intelligence is better characterized by a pattern of underlying strengths and weaknesses across various skills than by a monolithic EQ. Research in the coming years will likely address the independence of emotional intelligence from analytical (traditional) intelligence, cultural differences in the definition of emotionally intelligent competencies, and the ability of measures of emotional intelligence to predict important outcomes in school, work, and social life over and above the variance accounted for by traditional IQ.
Bibliography


—Peter Salovey

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