



Trait emotional intelligence: The impact of core-self evaluations and social desirability

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Abstract

Past criticisms of trait emotional intelligence (EI) have questioned its divergent and incremental validity related to the Big-5 dimensions of personality. This study introduces social desirability and core-self evaluations as an even greater hurdle for trait EI. In a field study of 180 employees, these two variables predict 62% of the variance in trait EI (compared to 29% from the Big-5). With the Big-5 dimensions of personality and IQ controlled, trait EI predicts coping, stress, and life satisfaction. When core-self evaluations and social desirability are added as additional control variables, the incremental validity coefficients between trait EI and the three criteria are largely reduced. However, trait EI significantly predicts incremental variance in coping, stress, and life satisfaction even after controlling for the Big-5, IQ, core-self evaluations, and social desirability.

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1. Introduction

The study of emotional intelligence (EI) continues to generate considerable activity within individual differences research, both from its supporters as well as its detractors. Research on

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emotional intelligence began primarily in the early 1990's (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). This original model included aspects of intelligence and a broader range of variables such as flexibility and motivation. A variety of measures have been developed within the general framework of the Salovey and Mayer (1990) model, including the Trait Meta Mood Scale (Salovey, Mayer, Goldman, Turvey, & Palfai, 1995), the Emotional Intelligence Survey (Schutte, Malouff, Hall, Haggerty, Cooper, Golden & Dornheim, 1998), and the Workgroup Emotional Intelligence Profile (Jordan, Ashkanasy, Hartel, & Hooper, 2002). Goleman's (1995) best-selling book further expanded conceptual models of EI to include a variety of additional traits, which spurred the development of a variety of expanded conceptual models and measures and include Bar-On's EQi (1997), Goleman's ECI (1998), and Petrides and Furnham's TEIQue (2003). These measures generally use self-reported inventories to measure EI.

Mayer and Salovey (1997) revised their definition of EI as a form of intelligence consisting of four dimensions, specifically the ability to perceive emotion, integrate emotion to facilitate thought, understand emotions, and regulate emotions to promote personal growth. The MSCEIT (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2002) was developed to measure EI as a specific form of intelligence based on this four dimensional model. Based in the distinction between this maximum-performance-based model (measured using a maximal performance test, also called ability-based EI, cognitive-emotional ability, or information processing EI) and the trait-based models listed above (assessing typical performance through self-report measures, also called personality-based EI, mixed model EI, or trait emotional self-efficacy), two distinct types of theories and measurement tools have been well-established in the EI literature (Perez, Petrides, & Furnham, 2005; Petrides & Furnham, 2000, 2001, 2003; Petrides, Furnham, & Mavroveli, 2007). Trait EI differs from maximum-performance-based measures in that it captures an individual's self-perception of their emotional intelligence. There is a distinct difference between one's actual ability and what one believes themselves capable of in various circumstances (Bandura, 1997) and this self-perception (Roberts, Zeidner, & Matthews, 2001) may influence relevant outcomes whether or not they are accurate. Despite the distinction in the literature between trait and maximum-performance-based EI models, trait EI measures have begun to emerge based on the four-dimensional model of EI from Mayer and Salovey (1997), such as the Wong & Law Emotional Intelligence Survey (Wong & Law, 2002) and the Self Report Emotional Intelligence Scale (Brackett, Rivers, Lerner, Salovey, & Shiffman, 2006). These measures, therefore, are narrower in scope than traditional trait EI measures. The narrower sampling domain of these measures, although similar to traditional trait EI measures, may demonstrate unique psychometric properties. It is this narrow model of trait EI which is the focus of this study.

There is controversy about what trait EI scales actually measure, what they predict, and whether the tests demonstrate divergent validity from other personality dimensions and abilities (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2000). Many trait measures have been criticized for a lack of divergent validity in their relation with established personality traits (Davies, Stankov, & Roberts, 1998). MacCann, Matthews, Zeidner, and Roberts (2003) highlight a variety of studies, which demonstrate significant correlations with multiple trait measures of EI and the Big-5 personality dimensions. Given the overlap between trait EI scales and the Big-5, it is entirely likely that much of the criterion-related validity of trait EI derives from personality rather than from unique EI variance.

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