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# Trait emotional intelligence and goal self-integration: important predictors of emotional well-being?

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## Abstract

Personal goals vary in the extent to which they are integrated with core aspects of the self. Goal self-integration was measured by asking 95 students to rate their reasons for adopting eight personal strivings. In addition, the trait emotional intelligence (EI) and emotional well-being of participants was measured, in order to determine the influence of goal self-integration and trait EI on each individual's sense of well-being. A correlational analysis indicated that individuals who report high levels of trait EI also construct more congruent, self-integrated personal goal systems. General linear modelling, however, indicated that global trait EI and goal self-integration were poor predictors of global emotional well-being. Despite this finding, two subscales: mood regulation (EI) and identified regulation (goal self-integration) were found to predict emotional well-being. This result indicated that emotional experience is influenced, in part, by one's ability to regulate emotions and by establishing personal strivings that are congruent with core values or personal convictions. It is tentatively concluded that trait EI and goal self-integration are both related to emotional well-being, however, further research is needed to identify which of subcomponents has the greatest influence.

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*Keywords:* Trait emotional intelligence; Emotional well-being; Goal self-integration; Personal strivings

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## 1. Introduction

Research has shown that when goals reflect a person's developing interests and core values, they are more likely to act effectively (Sheldon & Elliot, 1998) and experience enhanced well-being

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(Kasser & Ryan, 1993; McGregor & Little, 1998; Sheldon & Kasser, 1995). Evidently, psychological health can be accounted for, in part, by one's ability to set and work towards goals that are congruent with a sense of the self (goal self-integration), an ability that would seem to depend upon individual self-awareness.

In recent times emotional intelligence (EI) has been proposed as an important predictor of positive human functioning (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). The intention of the current study is to investigate whether the self-awareness required for goal self-integration resembles the internal awareness inherent in EI. Given the reflective and evaluative nature of EI, an emotionally intelligent individual may also be capable of the self-awareness required to identify important aspects of themselves. Thus, EI and goal self-integration may be related processes. The principle aim of this study is to present and test a model of the effects of goal self-integration and trait EI on emotional well-being.

## 2. Well-being and goals

As the present study examines human affective states, the specific construct of interest is emotional well-being, rather than subjective well-being or psychological well-being (PWB). In the current study emotional well-being will be a composite of positive and negative affect (Bradburn, 1969) and distinct from broader conceptualisations of well-being such as subjective well-being, which typically include a measure of positive and negative affect and life satisfaction (for a review see Diener, 1984) or PWB, which has been conceptualised as including components such as personal growth and purpose in life (see McGregor & Little, 1998; Ryff, 1989).

Personal goals play an important role in the maintenance of subjective well-being (for a review see Emmons, 1996). Whilst early subjective well-being models tended to locate well-being in the *attainment* of desired end states, or telic theories (see Diener, 1984), recent models have recognised the importance of the movement *towards* desired end states, or autotelic theories (see Omodei & Wearing, 1990). As Emmons (1996) observed, "goal attainment per se will not lead to subjectively satisfying long-term states unless these goals are intrinsically meaningful and integrated within an overall structure of the individual in his or her social context" (p. 333).

Several researchers have noted the importance of setting goals that reflect core aspects of the self and permit the integration of personality and goals. For example, Kasser and Ryan (1993) found that self-reported well-being was greatest for individuals who held intrinsically oriented goals (e.g., personal growth, satisfying relationships and community contributions) compared to external orientations (e.g., achieving wealth and financial success). Similarly, Sheldon and Kasser (1995) used coherence and congruence based measures of personality integration to test the proposition that greater psychological health is experienced when an individual's goals are horizontally and vertically consistent (coherence) and pursued for intrinsically satisfying reasons (congruence). They found that when individuals strive for self-determined reasons or towards intrinsically motivated goals, these measures were possible predictors of well-being, concluding that "personality integration plays a causal role with regard to psychological health" (p. 541). Finally, McGregor and Little (1998) found that people feel better when they are doing well (efficacy) but report higher levels of meaning when their projects are more reflective of self-identity (integrity).

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