

Comment on D. Caruso, Defining the Inkblot Called Emotional Intelligence

Submitted by:

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Apples and Applesauce

David Caruso's insightful and well-balanced response characterizes the three main models of EI in terms of a framework hinted at in my essay with Robert Emmerling. Caruso then proposes that the three main models in the field each belong in a different domain: the Bar-On model reflecting a "trait" approach, my own a "competence" perspective, and the Mayer-Salovey model an "intelligence" theory.

While this seems reasonable, I feel a need to clarify this proposed categorization in terms of a more careful analysis of the relationship between a competence and the underlying intelligence upon which it builds. I believe that there may be a problem here with logical types – more specifically, that emotional intelligence and EI competence are intimately related, but not of the same order. Rather, one emerges from the other. Instead of apples and oranges, it's apples and applesauce.

So the proposed division may have the unintended effect of obscuring important connections between aspects of emotional intelligence, by making them appear more unrelated than they actually are. Take as an analog the abilities of a gifted architect, which depend on a fundamental talent for spatial thinking. IQ tests include spatial thinking in the standard array of abilities they assess. However, simply scoring well on spatial abilities in itself would be insufficient for success as an architect – what's needed in addition is years spent cultivating the ways the person can apply her talent in spatial thinking to what an architect does.

In other words, a gift for spatial thinking offers a platform upon which the craft of architecture can build. Architectural skill can be seen as an emergent property of spatial ability, one that only emerges with years of proper training.

Likewise, the EI competencies are based on a platform of emotional intelligence, as I've proposed in my essay on this website, *An EI-Based Theory of Performance*. In a study of high-performers at Johnson & Johnson, each of these EI competencies was found to have a distinct developmental history over many years in a person's life (Dreyfus & Mangino, 2001). For instance, a woman who was an outstanding team leader described how she had honed this EI competence beginning as a coach for her school's field hockey team in junior high school. With each such iteration in the course of life, people can spontaneously build the skill sets that are identified in the organizational context as 'EI competence'. Lacking such serendipitous experiences in life, people can intentionally cultivate any of the EI competences, with the proper model of learning.

One reason I and others talk about the “EI competencies” as such – and not just as “competencies” – is to make the identical distinction in the universe of competence models that John Mayer and Peter Salovey have established in arguing for EI to be considered an intelligence apart from IQ: EI encompasses abilities like emotional self-regulation that are not assessed by IQ tests. Such EI abilities draw on sub-cortical brain regions that are quite distinct from the neocortical areas that are the neural substrates for all purely cognitive abilities, like IQ (Bar-On, Tranel, Denburg, & Bechara, 2003). EI mingles neocortical and subcortical skills, combining affective and cognitive abilities.

This marks a fundamental difference from competencies like technical skills, which rely solely on purely cognitive, IQ-type abilities based in the neocortex. This difference among types of competence is of more than mere theoretical importance: when it comes to learning in this domain, the brain operates in a different way than is the case when we learn a technical skill. By ignoring this distinction, organizations stand to waste time and money on training approaches that are ineffective. The guidelines posted on this website for “Best Practices” in EI training outline the most effective ways to help people boost this skill set, in contrast to methods that work well for technical skills.

So whether one uses the term “emotional intelligence” or “EI competence” for this set of human abilities seems to me of less practical concern than whether the working relationship between the two levels are well understood.

References

Dreyfus, C. & Mangino, M. (2001, April). Developing emotional intelligence competencies. Paper presented at the meeting of the Consortium for Research on Emotional Intelligence in Organizations, Cambridge, MA.

Bar-On, R., Tranel, D., Denburg, N. L., & Bechara, A. (2003). Exploring the neurological substrate of emotional intelligence. *Brain*, 126, 1790-2000.