

Comment on R.J. Emmerling and D. Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence: Issues and Common Misunderstandings*

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Defining the Inkblot Called *Emotional Intelligence*

Just what is this thing called emotional intelligence (EI)? The answer, to a large extent, depends on who you ask. EI has served as a sort of conceptual inkblot, an unstructured notion that is open to a vast number of interpretations. The article, *Emotional Intelligence: Issues and Common Misunderstandings*, by Robert Emmerling and Daniel Goleman provides a balanced and diplomatic overview of this new field, and of the various inkblot percepts. Their article is descriptive, and it is my hope that they, and others, will help to further advance the field through prescriptive articles.

Roots of the Field

Essentially, Emmerling and Goleman note that there have been three general approaches to EI, represented by Reuven Bar-On, Daniel Goleman, and Jack Mayer-Peter Salovey. Looking at the origins of the work of these teams is illuminating.

Reuven Bar-On's early interests seemed to be on a concept called subjective well-being and on non-intellective aspects of performance.

Daniel Goleman was a student of David McClelland, one of the most influential psychologists in the area of competencies.

Jack Mayer was trained in both clinical and experimental psychology, and worked in the areas of human intelligence as well as cognition and affect (how emotions and thinking interact). Colleague Peter Salovey had similar interests in cognition and affect, and its various applications (especially to health psychology). It is this ability model of emotional intelligence that I have been involved with, conducting research, developing assessments, and consulting to organizations and individuals.

One can see the effects of these early professional experiences on the later work each has conducted on EI. These differences are highlighted by Emmerling and Goleman, as well they should. This background helps, in part, to explain why there are such differences between EI approaches, despite a common language.

The State of the Field

Emmerling and Goleman note that scientific disciplines grow and develop and (hopefully) mature over time. They also paint a positive picture of the field's health, and

it's a picture with which I agree. It's instructive to take a look at the field of intelligence itself. In 1921, E. L. Thorndike and the *Journal of Educational Psychology* asked experts to define *intelligence*. There was no consensus as to its meaning, definition or measurement, although a few themes were apparent. Strikingly, a similar attempt was made 65 years later in 1986. This intelligence symposium, spearheaded by intelligence researchers Douglas Detterman and Robert Sternberg (1986), yielded a variety of definitions and approaches. In 1986, as in 1921, there was no consensus as to what intelligence is. And as recently as 2000, Nathan Brody noted "We know how to measure something called intelligence, but we do not know what has been measured." (p. 31).

For emotional intelligence, we can start the 65-year countdown in 1990 (the date of the seminal Salovey and Mayer article) or 1995 (the date of the best-selling Goleman book), which means that the next major update of the field should occur about the year 2055!

My guess is that the emotional intelligence field in 2055 will show a great deal more progress than its older sibling – general intelligence – has in the same amount of time. It has already shown a great deal of growth. For example, just about 6 years after publishing a scathing article (Davies, Stankov, & Roberts, 1998) claiming that emotional intelligence does not exist, and only 1 year after publishing a weighty tome called *Emotional Intelligence: Science and Myth*, a symposium was organized by one of the authors (Richard Roberts) called *Emotional Intelligence: Knowns and Unknowns*. Its stated goal was as follows: "The purpose of this workshop was to attempt to provide a scientific definition and taxonomic model of emotional intelligence and to explore assessment and applications of the construct."

Clearly, we are moving forward.

A Proactive Agenda for the Field

Although it is likely that the field will develop on its own, there are a number of proactive suggestions I'd like to make in order to guide its direction and speed its development.

Use a Common Language and Terminology

I have a vested interest in the language of EI, as you'll soon see. I do not believe that non-ability, or non-intelligence definitions or models of EI should be considered EI. It's not merely a scientific quibble about words. If we, as researchers or practitioners, don't have a common language we cannot hope to effectively communicate with each other. We also risk alienating our clients as they struggle to understand what it is we have been selling them. For example, Emmerling and Goleman note the surprise of people when they learn that there are at least three disparate approaches to EI.

I'll propose a starting point for a dictionary of EI terms, the first three entries consisting of the following:

Traits
 Competencies
 Emotional Intelligence

Table 1 summarizes these three terms.

Table 1. A Few Terms.

| Term | Current Approach | Related to: |
|------------------------|--|---|
| Trait Approach | Traits related to adaptation and coping (e.g., assertiveness) | Models of personality and dispositional traits. |
| Competency Approach | Acquired skills and competencies underlying effective leadership (e.g., influence) | Leadership competency models. |
| Emotional Intelligence | Intellectual abilities using emotional information (e.g., emotion identification) | Models of general, or standard, intelligence. |

To be less subtle, what I am proposing is that for a model to be considered and called emotional intelligence it must combine emotion with intelligence. Calling traits such as assertiveness or influence emotional intelligence just does not seem to be helpful.

In the past, my colleagues and I have referred to non-intelligence approaches to EI as “mixed models”. In doing so, we may have added to the confusion in the field. Instead, I propose that the term EI be reserved for intelligence or ability-based models.

This critical differentiation seems to be occurring on its own in the field as we begin to see non-ability approaches adopting terms such as socio-emotional traits and emotional competencies.

Decouple Theory and Assessment

Right now, the three major EI models are each associated with a distinctive measurement approach as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Measurement Approaches.

| Term | Measurement Approach | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------|----------------|
| | <i>Self-report</i> | <i>Other-report</i> | <i>Ability</i> |
| Trait Approach | √ | | |
| Competency Approach | | √ | |
| Emotional Intelligence | | | √ |

The mapping of each model to a specific measurement tool and approach is in some ways unfortunate. It’s allowed us to confuse EI models or theories with a specific measurement approach.

I believe that we need to separate the underlying model of emotional intelligence from efforts at *measuring* emotional intelligence. In other words, theory building comes first. Then, we can devise the best methods to measure the concept we have theorized about.

Here is a specific example. I work within the ability approach to EI and have helped to develop the Mayer, Salovey, Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT). However, it may also make sense to develop both self- and other-report assessments that are based upon the ability model of EI. These new assessments would not measure actual EI, but instead, perceptions of one's own, or others', EI.

Support the Scientific Method

There have been too many wild claims made in the frenzy to stake out territory during the gold rush of emotional intelligence. Part of the problem we face is that writing for the general public is a lot different than writing for the scientific community. It is distressing that at times certain claims have been based on unverified research results or drafts of manuscripts never published. We also have a problem when we resort to claims of being the “first” to use a term or coin a phrase, as if such claims provide scientific support for our work.

We also need to support the use of the scientific method when working with other researchers. That may sound like a very obvious suggestion, but it's not one that is always followed in our field.

For example, a component of the scientific method is *peer review*. This is the process by which your research is critiqued by fellow scientists to make sure that your methods are solid, and the conclusions drawn from them are valid. It's not that people are fabricating data that is at issue. The issue is that it is very difficult to edit your own work, and peer review provides another, typically more objective, point of view.

This field is too new, and fast-paced, to rely solely upon peer-reviewed articles. However we need to be cautious about the claims we make that have not been subject to peer review, even those employing the scientific method.

Promote Research

Are current competency approaches based upon underlying emotional intelligence? Do existing tools actually measure emotional competencies? Are current competency models significantly different than other existing leadership competency models such as those developed by the Center for Creative Leadership and others? Are current trait models of emotional intelligence distinguishable from existing models of general personality or well-being? Are ability tests of Emotional Intelligence noticeably different than other ability assessments that measure intelligence? What outcomes are predicted by ability tests of EI?

We must support research programs investigating these, and other, questions. Practitioners must join forces with researchers to conduct badly-needed outcome and training research, as well as dozens of critical validity studies. In each case, such studies need to examine what EI *adds*, if anything, to our understanding of professional workplace and personal outcomes based upon existing theories and models of personality, competencies and intelligence.

This does not mean that we must stand on the sidelines until all of the numbers are in before we can apply the knowledge that we have acquired. We need to be open about the limitations of the field and recommend applications that we know are responsible and which do no harm to our clients.

Take Charge and Take Responsibility

The bright light of the field has attracted many different people. Legitimate researchers and savvy practitioners have been drawn to the field. However, they have also been joined by those making unsubstantiated research claims and by intellectually-dishonest business consultants selling their wares to the unsuspecting consumer. None of us condones dishonest research or practice – far from it. It angers me to hear of such abuses, as it should all of us. (Anger, after all, is an appropriate emotion that rises from a sense of injustice.)

When we become aware of such misuse, we need to take steps to correct the situation. It's not up to any one individual to claim to have the last word on EI, but it is up to all of us to make sure that the field is being represented accurately and responsibly. What does this mean? For example, if we are misquoted, or discover an article making some unfounded or fantastic claim, we need to speak up and speak out.

This is not always easy to do, as I have found out. I have seen some of our own group's work unintentionally misrepresented and then repeated, in good faith, by others. It's a frustrating, problem, but a correctable one.

There are also opportunities to be proactive. In an article (in a peer-reviewed journal) authored by my colleagues Jack Mayer, Peter Salovey and myself, we included a brief disclaimer noting that as authors of the MSCEIT we receive royalties on MSCEIT sales. A soon-to-be-published book, *The Emotionally Intelligent Manager* (Caruso & Salovey), touts the importance of the ability model of EI in the workplace, but provides a number of cautions and points out the limitations of our model and existing research.

Clarifying the importance of analytical intelligence, or IQ, is another example of responsible reporting. After repeated claims that "EQ" is twice as important as IQ appeared in the popular press, and unfortunately, in the scientific literature, Goleman has actively tried to clarify and to correct this erroneous impression. In essence, Goleman has shown that IQ, while important, loses its predictive power in a world where everyone is smart. (This is the *restriction of range* problem.) The most recent example of this

clarification is contained in *Emotional Intelligence: Issues and Common Misunderstandings*, where the authors discuss this issue in some detail.

The existence of the Consortium for Research on Emotional Intelligence in Organizations (CREIO) itself, as well as its efforts such as EI training guidelines, are yet other proactive and positive examples of taking responsibility for the way the field is portrayed. It is interesting that one of the founding members of CREIO is Daniel Goleman. Yet, CREIO has not only allowed other approaches to EI to be represented, they have at times been quite aggressive in their pursuit of alternative views.

The Emotional Tone of Debate

The EI debate among researchers has oftentimes been quite passionate and intense. Unfortunately, the debate has also, at times, been personal and overly negative. (I regret to say that there have been times when I, too, have contributed to this negative tone.)

But there are also a number of positive examples in the field. For instance, while my colleagues and I have serious differences of opinion with one of the more well-known people in the field, Reuven Bar-On, Bar-On actively sought our contributions to his *Handbook* and also encouraged his test publisher to take on the MSCEIT. Likewise, Goleman has been subject to our critiques, yet, he has been very open to discussion and to debate, and has striven to represent our work in a fair and balanced manner.

At the same time, this field, perhaps more than any other contemporary field of psychology, desperately needs the insights and critiques of skilled researchers. The contributions of debunkers such as Gerry Matthews, Richard Roberts, Adrian Furnham, and others have been hard-hitting, with a message that is often difficult to listen to. Yet, listen we must.

The challenge should be for us to engage each other in dialogue and in debate, but to do so in a constructive manner. We need to have the courage of our convictions to stand up for what we value and what we believe in. There are critical differences and points of contention between the various schools of EI thought and between the researchers, writers and practitioners carrying on this work. We should not brush these aside, nor should we repress the uncomfortable feelings we have when hearing some claim or other that we disagree with. Those uncomfortable feelings contain data, and we must stay open to such data in order for us to be effective.

The Case for the Ability Model of EI

The ability model of EI, as formulated by my colleagues Mayer and Salovey, views emotions and thought as working with each other in adaptive ways. The model is intelligence-based, and it is related to other, standard intelligences. It proposes four, related emotional abilities.

We first accurately *identify* emotions. Second, we *use* these emotions to influence how we think and what we think about. Third, we attempt to *understand* the underlying causes of these emotions and determine how these emotions will change over time. Finally, we *manage* with emotions by integrating the wisdom of these feelings into our thinking, decision making and actions.

The MSCEIT is the most recent operationalization of this model, and it has demonstrated adequate test reliability, is unrelated to measures of personality, and predicts some important personal and professional outcomes, although it does so at moderate levels. One of the most exciting aspects of the ability model, and the MSCEIT, is that they are describing a unique skill set, unlike other existing models and tests.

But the ability model, and the MSCEIT, describe just one component of human ability and behavior. They are focused and narrow in scope. This leaves a lot of room for other approaches – whether trait or competency based - to better understand and develop people.

Conclusion

We have seen huge corporations brought to their knees because their boards were filled with insiders, or their books audited by companies with a vested interest in selling more lucrative consulting services. Problems were ignored, and negative results were disregarded.

If we, as a body of science and practice, suppress critical comments, surround ourselves with insiders, and fail to ask the tough questions, we may have a happier field, but a less effective one.

We will advance this field by asking tough questions, conducting research, providing constructive criticism, and engaging in passionate debate with each other. At the same time we need to remain open to the wisdom of our own emotions whenever our work is on the receiving end of these tough questions and constructive criticism. *Emotional Intelligence: Issues and Common Misunderstandings* is an excellent contribution toward productively defining the issues in this field. Now, we must directly address these difficult issues to bring forth a thriving field of inquiry that provides positive value to the world.

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Notes

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