Emotional Intelligence From the Perspective of Cognitive-Experiential Self-Theory

Seymour Epstein
Emotional Intelligence from the Perspective of Cognitive-Experiential Self-Theory

Seymour Epstein

Abstract

In this chapter I first discuss the limitations of two influential approaches to measuring emotional intelligence (EI). One is based on the use of performance items that measure abilities specifically related to emotions and the other uses self-report items that measure something much broader than just the intelligent use and expression of emotions. I note that both approaches suffer from a lack of theory for guiding the selection of the items in their measures of EI as well as from other limitations. In the next section I present a theory that can account for the findings from both of these approaches as well as those from a different, more process-oriented approach. In the final section I present an instrument based on the theory and I summarize the support it received from an extensive research program. I conclude that the use of the term “emotional intelligence” can reasonably be used to refer to a broader adaptive system of automatically learning from experience by recognizing that emotions are a critically important aspect of that system.

Limitations in Two Influential Approaches to Measuring Emotional Intelligence

To intelligently discuss EI it is necessary to indicate what one means by EI. Daniel Goleman, in his popular book on EI, says it consists of the following non-intellectual abilities: the ability to motivate oneself and persist in the face of frustration, the ability to control impulses and delay gratification, the ability to regulate moods and keep distress from interfering with effective thinking, the ability to empathize, and to be able to hope (Goleman, 1995, p. 34). Later in the book Goleman adds social ability and indicates its importance by discussing it at some length (pp. 111-114). In a subsequent book, Goleman (1998) adds the following attributes: trustworthiness, adaptability, innovation, effective communication, and cooperation. He provides no research to support this selection. It apparently simply reflects his personal preferences. In summary, Goleman provides a wide-range of non-intellective desirable abilities that he regards as aspects of EI, most of which do not refer to emotions and that have no theoretical or empirical basis for being considered components of an overall ability that can reasonably be referred to as EI.

Others have provided their own lists of attributes of EI based on their own personal preferences, which has led to the criticism that the measurement and definition of EI have become so inclusive as to make the definition and its measurement virtually meaningless. (Daus & Ashkanasy, 2003; Locke (2005); Murphy & Sideman, 2006). This raises the question of why the concept of EI, if it is so meaningless, has been embraced by many authorities and others as an important construct. I believe the major reason is that they realize...
References


Author Note

Seymour Epstein, Ph. D., ABPP, is a clinical psychologist and a Professor Emeritus in the Psychology Department at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. He has proposed an integrative, dual-process theory of personality that includes two modes of information processing, rational and experiential, each with its own form of intelligence. Experiential intelligence is broader than and includes EI.

Correspondence regarding this article should be directed to Seymour Epstein, Psychology Department, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA 01003 or to septein@psych.umass.edu.