

University of New Hampshire University of New Hampshire Scholars' Repository

UNH Personality Lab

Research Institutes, Centers and Programs

1-1-2004

Controversies in Emotional Intelligence

John D. Mayer

University of New Hampshire, Durham, jack.mayer@unh.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholars.unh.edu/personality_lab

Recommended Citation

Mayer, John D., "Controversies in Emotional Intelligence" (2004). *UNH Personality Lab*. 5.
https://scholars.unh.edu/personality_lab/5

This Web Page is brought to you for free and open access by the Research Institutes, Centers and Programs at University of New Hampshire Scholars' Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in UNH Personality Lab by an authorized administrator of University of New Hampshire Scholars' Repository. For more information, please contact nicole.hentz@unh.edu.

Contents

Introduction to the Controversies.....	1
Is EI the Best Predictor of Success in Life?.....	2
Have the Originators of EI Missed the Point of their Own Research?	4
Part 1: A key question about the importance of emotional intelligence	4
Part 2: What Are the Advantages of a More Focused Approach to EI?	5
Central Points of Joshua Freedman’s Response.....	5
The Issue of Being Let Down	6
Compensating Virtues of This Approach.....	6
Part 3: What Are the Advantages of a More Focused Approach to EI?	6
Three Advantages of This Approach	7
Scientific Advantages	7
Psychoeducational Advantages.....	8
Expansive Advantages	8
Conclusions	9
Critical Thinking about Emotional Intelligence (EI): Addressing the Gee-Whiz Argument.....	10
Can Self-Report Measures Contribute to the Study of Emotional Intelligence? A Conversation with Joseph Ciarrochi.....	11
Is Self-Report Data Worth Using in Psychological Science?	12
Should the term Self-Report Data be Replaced?	12
Why Are Different Sources of Data on the same Trait (e.g., Emotional Intelligence) Weakly Related?	13
The Need for a Theory of Data	14
Emotional Intelligence: Why Use Self-Report Measures At All?	16
Is Emotional Intelligence Old Wine in New Bottles? A Conversation Between Frank Landy and John D. Mayer	22
References Referred to on this Web Page.....	25
Reference(s) Cited on this Webpage.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.

Introduction to the Controversies

In the early days of studying emotional intelligence, many individuals embraced the idea while many others remained skeptical of it. And even those who liked the idea of emotional intelligence disagreed as to what it is and how to measure it.

In this section of the web site, I have compiled discussions among psychologists and others interested in EI that represented some of the controversies of mid 2000s. Many of these discussions were conducted via e-mail, and all are posted with the writer's permissions. The discussions include such topics as whether scientists studying emotional intelligence have missed the significance of their own concept, whether emotional intelligence is, in fact, a new idea, and how to measure emotional intelligence.

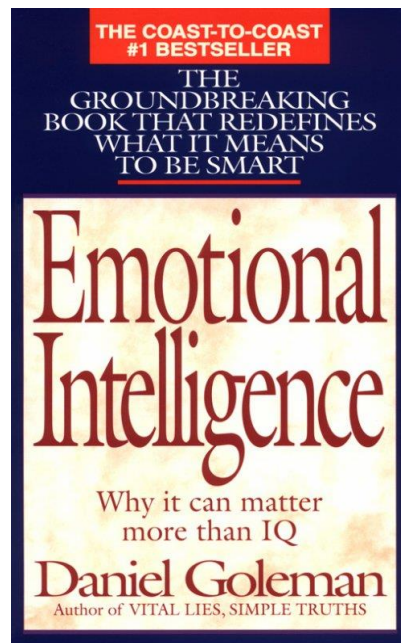
Some, though not all, of the controversies have since been resolved (for example, see the review of the field in the 2008 *Annual Review of Psychology*; other controversies remain today. Whether resolved or not, however, these e-mail discussions provide a unique insight into the developing thinking regarding theory and research in the area.

Is EI the Best Predictor of Success in Life?

by John D. Mayer

Editor's Note: Joshua Freedman responds to this post below with, "Have the originators of EI missed the point...?"

When the concept of emotional intelligence was popularized, a number of claims for it were made.

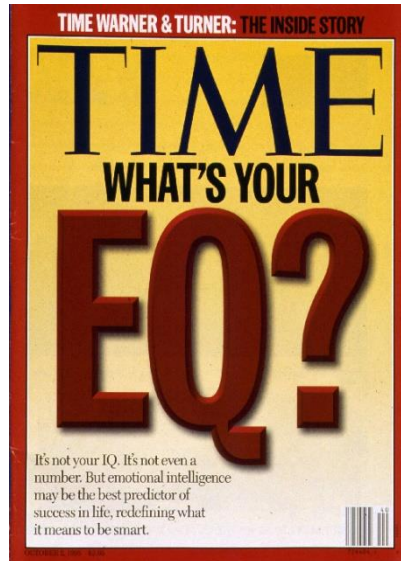


Daniel Goleman's (1995) popularization began with some carefully-couched suggestions about the power of EI and its potential for prediction in life. Those claims also reflected some considerable optimism:

No one can yet say exactly how much of the variability from person to person in life's course it accounts for. But what data exist suggest it can be as powerful, and at times more powerful, than IQ. (Goleman, 1995, p. 34).

The claims were featured on the U.S. edition's cover, which apparently added the phrase "Why it can matter more than IQ," to the book's title. (That is, the phrase appears to be a subtitle, but it was not actually the subtitle to the book).

Upon release of Goleman's book, Time Magazine ran a cover story on emotional intelligence.



The quote on the bottom left of the TIME cover read:

"It's not your IQ. It's not even a number. But emotional intelligence may be the best predictor of success in life, redefining what it means to be smart (Time, October 2nd, 1995, cover)".

This is an amusingly self-contradictory statement. On the one hand, the statement indicates that EI can't be quantified ("It's not even a number"). On the other hand, the author(s) blithely go on to make quantitative claims for the concept (i.e., "the best predictor of success...").

Dr. Salovey and I had published our review article, "Emotional Intelligence" in 1990, and a demonstration of how emotional intelligence could be measured as well (Mayer & Salovey, 1990; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). In 1993 we published a further article entitled, "The Intelligence of Emotional Intelligence" (Mayer & Salovey, 1993). My colleagues and I made no such claims about the power of EI in those articles -- or in any of the many articles we have published since. In fact, we have tried to explain why such claims are unrealistic in a number of ways.

A general outline of what we believe can be found in a "Shared Perspectives" column in the APA Newsletter, the Monitor (Mayer, 1999, September).

The general outline, however, does not by itself convey the full logic behind why claims such as, "EI might be the best predictor of success in life," are unrealistic. For that reason, we have provided more careful analyses of what such claims mean, and why they are unlikely to be true.

To better understand how we understand certain claims about EI, you might want to take a look at the following two-page excerpt in Mayer, Salovey & Caruso (2000, pp. 402-403, section on "A third approach...").

While we were writing the above critique, further claims arose that were different from those above. A critique of those claims can be found in Mayer & Cobb (2000).

Happily, fewer people in the field are now making these claims about emotional intelligence. There appears to be a more realistic approach to the field, and a willingness to see what the research says. The

real live facts of emotional intelligence are quite encouraging -- that is, it does seem to predict important outcomes. If those predictive levels are far from the levels that some of the claims above suggested, they are still of considerable practical and conceptual importance.

Have the Originators of EI Missed the Point of their Own Research?

Part 1: A key question about the importance of emotional intelligence

By Joshua Freedman

Editor's Note: Joshua Freedman's commentary begins with a reference to my (John D. Mayer's) online post: "Is EI the most important predictor of success in life?"—now a part of the *What is EI?* document of this EI portion of the lab web site. Joshua's comments are posted with his permission.

Freedman: While John Mayer's point is scientifically sound—clearly there is no research yet that proves EI or EQ is the single most important predictor of life success—perhaps there is more to EQ than its originators have considered.

I've heard both David Caruso and Peter Salovey suggest that the popular excitement over "EQ" was largely due to timing (and Daniel Goleman's ability to promote this fascinating idea). Coming on the heels of *The Bell Curve* with its implications of racial supremacy and genetically determined destiny, Goleman's 1995 book offered a humanistic alternative. The message the "EQ predicts success, and unlike IQ, EQ can be learned" was the perfect antidote to *The Bell Curve*. This is a reasonable explanation, but I find it insufficient to explain the global surge of interest in emotional intelligence —; so perhaps there's more?

Instead I suggest the notion of emotional intelligence answers an essential, primal longing. It meets a fundamental need at this point in human evolution. At a "gut level" it is evident that emotions drive people. No one who's attempted a challenging conversation with their boss, or raised a child, can deny that emotions are one of the most powerful forces in human interaction. And if there is an intelligence we can develop to grapple with this intangible force of nature, we suddenly are at liberty to achieve our highest intentions.

Perhaps even more viscerally, millions of people have experienced first-hand the depredations of poor use of emotions. We've experienced the friend or family member whose fears and shames spiral into guilt-laden arrogance or self-indulgent misery. We've watched executives destroy the work of lifetimes because they are too uncomfortable with emotions to have honest dialogue. We've experienced the global malaise that's an inevitable result of leaders who can't manage their feelings of pride and insecurity and greed. So, while there may not be scientific validity to the claim that "emotional intelligence is the best predictor of success in life," we've all seen how a lack of emotional intelligence destroys so many kinds of success.

Conversely, many of us have first-hand experience of the stunning delight that arises when we feel a powerful emotional connection to another person or team. We've done the impossible simply because it felt good to do so, because our emotions and spirits became engaged in meeting a challenge. We've seen the awesome power of someone whose self-awareness, integrity, and authenticity inspires near-endless trust and commitment. And we want more.

So perhaps these essential emotional needs and drives are something other than the scientifically sound construct called “emotional intelligence.” Or, perhaps the EI researchers stumbled across something deeper and more powerful than they yet understand. It may be that “emotional intelligence predicts only a small part of success,” or perhaps we need to ask if that which is currently measurable and understandable is but the tip of the iceberg? Maybe emotional intelligence is the best predictor of success in life, and our scholarly colleagues now have the challenge of proving it.

Joshua Freedman is Director of Program, Six Seconds EQ Network

Part 2: What Are the Advantages of a More Focused Approach to EI?

by John D. Mayer

Acknowledgement: Joshua Freedman read an earlier draft of this piece. His comments in response helped me strengthen the writing, and I am grateful for his assistance. The views expressed are my own.

Central Points of Joshua Freedman’s Response

In a commentary on this web site regarding claims about EI, I argued that the popularization had seriously and strongly overstated the power of EI —; although I hasten to add that EI is an important variable. Joshua Freedman’s comments on my original commentary painted a qualitative picture of the importance of EI. He writes, in regard to the potential importance of having low EI:

We’ve watched executives destroy the work of lifetimes because they are too uncomfortable with emotions to have honest dialogue. We’ve experienced the global malaise that’s an inevitable result of leaders who can’t manage their feelings of pride and insecurity and greed. We’ve experienced the friend or family member whose fears and shames spiral into guilt-laden arrogance or self-indulgent misery.

He also offers a contrasting picture of the high EI individual:

...many of us have first-hand experience of the stunning delight that arises when we feel a powerful emotional connection to another person or team. We’ve done the impossible simply because it felt good to do so, because our emotions and spirits became engaged in meeting a challenge. We’ve seen the awesome power of someone whose self-awareness, integrity, and authenticity inspires near-endless trust and commitment. And we want more.

One of the purposes of becoming a psychologist, for me, was surely to learn how to help people avoid the sorts of problems in social behavior that Josh talks about, and to help them capitalize on the more positive parts of their personalities. Josh does a superb job of conveying the yearning for these possibilities. I share these concerns and aspirations, yet I see a risk in attributing all this to EI. Later I will explain how a more focused definition of EI can actually help meet these challenges.

Toward the end of his piece, Josh raises some important questions:

So perhaps these essential emotional needs and drives are something other than the scientifically sound construct called “emotional intelligence.” Or, perhaps the EI researchers stumbled across something deeper and more powerful than they yet understand. It may be that “emotional intelligence predicts only a small part of success,” or perhaps we need to ask if that which is currently measurable and understandable is but the tip of the iceberg?

The Issue of Being Let Down

Josh's comments reflect a more general theme: People have told me they feel let down by my statements that emotional intelligence will not provide all the answers we need to help people behave in a better way. This disappointment is, I think, understandable in the face of what the popular claims have promised. The popularized version(s) of emotional intelligence seemed to promise that emotional intelligence might be *the* variable that could help explain a number of problems, and ameliorate people's lives in a number of different areas (see the first installment of this discussion).

Those who put their faith in such statements, or simply hoped such statements might be true, could not help but feel let down by what I have said on the matter. Still, I would rather have people disappointed by my realism than disappointed by emotional intelligence. One purpose of my continued work in the field has been to help people form a clear understanding of this concept. (Another, related, purpose is to help people measure the concept accurately).

Compensating Virtues of This Approach

My focus thus far—on responding to popular claims—has meant that I have not had time to explain the positive aspects of the message I am trying, most conscientiously, to convey to those interested in emotional intelligence. It is the positive part of the message I would like to focus on in the remainder of these comments.

Part 3: What Are the Advantages of a More Focused Approach to EI?

by John Mayer

Before I go into the advantages of the model of EI I employ, an extremely quick précis of my views on emotional intelligence can help provide a context for those remarks (e.g., Mayer 1997; Mayer & Salovey, 1993; Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2000; Salovey & Mayer, 1990).

My main points are that:

- Emotional intelligence is an intelligence, and, as such, a member of a broader family of intelligences including verbal intelligence, perceptual-organizational intelligence, spatial intelligence, social intelligence, and the like.
- Further, as a member of the intelligences, EI can also be described as a mental ability trait, which means it is part of a broader class of mental capacities that also include creativity, verbal fluency, and possibly, mental absorption of the type necessary for hypnosis.
- Emotional intelligence, as an intelligence, and more generally as a mental ability, is also part of an even broader group of features or characteristics called personality traits, which include a further group of characteristics such as, for example, optimism-pessimism, extraversion-introversion, motivated-unmotivated, and many others.
- Emotional intelligence is one of many factors in an individual's personality (see "1" above).
- Emotional intelligence can act as a positive force in someone's life, but also as a negative force in some instances (though it will generally be positive).
- Emotional intelligence probably accounts for between 1 and 10% of the variance of some focal but important life patterns and outcomes. For example, emotional intelligence correlates negatively with problem behaviors such as fighting and drug use (meaning that as EI goes up, problem behavior goes down). Regarding this point, it is useful to note that most people -- even some psychologists -- don't

fully understand or appreciate what the technical phrase “between 1 and 10% of the variance” means. That, however, is a matter for another commentary.

- There are surely many positive life outcomes unrelated to emotional intelligence.
- There are likely a few carefully-specified life outcomes that are more highly predicted by EI than what is described above.
- It doesn’t make sense to speak of raising EI per se, but it does make sense to speak of raising emotional knowledge and that may be of help to some people.

Perhaps the best-known alternative description of emotional intelligence comes from Daniel Goleman’s books. I believe those books, particularly the first, provide a lively, engaging reading experience, full of provocative ideas and coverage of excellent research. In those books, Goleman indicates:

- Emotional intelligence is a broad description of a major part of an individual’s character and/or personality that includes abilities such as being able: (i) to motivate oneself, (ii) to persist in the face of frustrations, (iii) to control impulses, (vi) to delay gratifications, (vii) to regulate moods, (viii) to keep distress from swamping the ability to think, (ix) to empathize, and (x) to hope. (Goleman, 1995, p. 34). At other times, further characteristics are added, including, (i) to experience enthusiasm, (ii) to feel confident, (iii) to be socially adroit, and (iv) overall, to have good character (Goleman, 1995, pp. 79, 115, 285).
- Together, emotional intelligence and cognitive capacities cover most of an individual’s personality (I am inferring this from the fact that all desirable qualities of an individual mentioned in job advertisements could be classified as one or the other (Goleman, 1998, p. 31).
- The higher the EI the better (again, this is implied rather than stated).
- EI accounts for a great deal of a person’s success in many areas of life.
- EI can be readily changed and improved (Goleman, 1995, p. ; 1998, p. 7).*

**Daniel Goleman wrote that he was employing one of our basic descriptions of EI as his own, and modifying it by “expanding these abilities [the one’s we described] into five main domains” (Goleman, 1995, p. 43/ see also Chapter 3 footnote 14, p. 189). Although the result was much broader than our own version, there was some justification for claiming the overlap; see Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2000, p. 401-402 for a discussion.*

I greatly appreciate the enthusiasm that Dr. Goleman and others have brought to the subject. I also believe, however, that the more rigorous definition employed here and elsewhere (e.g., Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 1999, p. 267; Mayer & Salovey, 1997, p 10) can assist those interested in the topic in three realms: (a) scientific advantages, (b) psycho-educational advantages, and (c) advantages in expanding personal and social growth.

Three Advantages of This Approach

Scientific Advantages

The clear scientific advantage is that the definition of EI to which I subscribe is relatively clear, uniform, and consistent. It is amenable to ability-based measurement. It is consistent with psychological terminology as it presently exists in the field.

The general concept has been stable since my original papers with Peter Salovey in 1990 and 1993. The specific, revised model we now employ, introduced in 1997, has remained the same for six years. (This is important because it illustrates that we do not have to change our formulation of the concept to fit different research results; rather, what we say about EI pertains to the same EI throughout). From here on out we expect to change it only based on findings from empirical research. This concept of EI is largely

distinct and discrete relative to other psychological features of an individual. That makes it possible to study, and to study as a distinct phenomenon.

Psychoeducational Advantages

Psychoeducational advantages refer to those advantages that pertain to discussing, testing, and/or teaching another person about emotional intelligence. First, the full theory of emotional intelligence we have promulgated is sufficiently logical to appeal and make sense as much to an engineer as to an artist. Even someone who does not possess high EI is able to recognize its description as reasonable, logical, and, arguably, a standard intelligence.

The psychoeducational advantages of this approach, however, can be seen in the following hypothetical communication over a test of EI. Here is one way I would imagine one can discuss a test of EI with a person being tested.

- We want to respect the complexity of your personality. EI is one, specific part of personality, amidst many others. Your personality is too sophisticated and individual to be encapsulated by one feature, or even 10 features. That said, we can't look at all the parts of personality at once, so, today, let's consider this one: Emotional intelligence.
- EI plays an important function in the mind. It allows people to think about and understand their feelings, as well as to use their feelings to enhance thought. It serves as a sort of bridge between two quite different realms: Intellectual functioning, on the one hand, and emotional activity, on the other.
- EI has been found to be a useful predictor of certain life outcomes. Generally speaking, a high EI means that a person may create smoother, closer personal relationships; a lower EI sometimes leads to problematic social behavior, including more interpersonal conflict.
- It is important to note, regarding point 3 above -- the predictions from EI -- that individuals will vary. That is, the statement in "3" is a statistical statement and refers to averages, and it is not a definite pronouncement about anyone. For example, a person high in EI may use it to emotionally manipulate others, leading to poor interpersonal relations. Or, a person low in EI may be very polite and cooperative, and use that politeness (in place of EI) to smooth social conduct.

So why look at EI? For the reason that we look at any feature of our mental life/personality, because it tells us something about ourselves we didn't know before. By looking at these parts one by one when the opportunities arise, a person gradually gains knowledge of him or herself. One's model of oneself becomes more accurate, and some people can use that increased accuracy in self knowledge to make better life choices.

When I imagine what advocates of the popular version of EI are saying to people -- that is, that EI is everything cognitive ability is not, that it accounts for 80% of success in life, and the like, I worry a lot about how the test-taker might respond. To my mind that information is highly misleading and potentially dangerous. The above information, portions of which are tailored to the scientific model which my colleagues and I have developed, is accurate and, I think, as a consequence, a reasonable and mostly helpful communication.

Expansive Advantages

By expansive advantages, I mean that the model I am recommending allows a person to keep exploring and understanding more and more about him or herself (or others). It may seem paradoxical to say that a focused model such as I am discussing here is more expansive than a popular notion of EI that describes it as a huge part of character, but I would claim this model is, indeed, far more flexible. Consider a model in

which EI (or EI together with cognitive skills) is everything; what's left? Not much to talk about except cognitive skills.

By contrast, if we view EI as a single, coherent entity with defined subareas (four branches in our model), then we can move in and out of a consideration of it, along with other features of personality. Let me return, at this point, to one of Josh's examples: "We've watched executives destroy the work of lifetimes because they are too uncomfortable with emotions to have honest dialogue..."

Is this a failure of EI (as I define it)? It quite possibly could be. The executive may have found honest dialogue difficult because when people expressed their emotions, he or she was unable to understand what those people meant, unable to relate it to his or her own life, and/or unable to understand what emotional changes might be possible.

On the other hand, let's say we give the executive an EI test, and he scores well on it. Well, the expansive part of this model is that we have now ruled that out low EI as an explanation for the trouble, so it is possible to go on to other alternatives. For example, we might want to ask whether, given that the person can adequately think about emotions (e.g., has high EI), he or she is simply overwhelmed by his or her emotions. This is called, "emotionality" and sometimes "neuroticism," and it is both theoretically and empirically distinct from EI in this model.

Or perhaps the executive has a normal level of EI, but is low in honesty. The executive may be naturally exploitative and have a life philosophy that telling other people lies is often beneficial -- if not for them, at least for him or her. In this case, we have another problem entirely. I'm not sure it would have much effect, but one could point out that a lack of honesty, in this case, was interfering with his or her interpersonal relationships.

The above description might lead to a consideration of several parts of personality -- EI, emotionality, and honesty. Ultimately, some possible cause for the destructive pattern of behavior might be revealed (or not). This is the expansive part of my viewpoint. By using a focused and accurate definition of EI, we can distinguish and differentiate it, and that allows us to consider other important aspects of the person. That means we respect the person as a complex individual and really try to understand what is causing a particular dilemma.

Altogether, I believe these personality features: EI, emotionality, honesty, and dozens more, each has a deep and profound influence on how a person behaves and lives. I think there is something very deep (and also superficially obvious) here, and I am quite happy to spend my time researching the issues involved.

Conclusions

So, is EI important? Yes, in several ways. First, if EI exists (and we believe we have provided sufficient evidence to indicate it does), it adds to our understanding of the ways in which people think and reason. In addition, it allows for good, replicable predictions of important outcomes. To see what we now believe EI predicts, see the "validity" section of the 2004 Psychological Inquiry article posted in the reprints section of this site. So EI is important. So are many of the personality variables with which it co-exists, and which also influence an individual's outcomes in life.

Critical Thinking about Emotional Intelligence (EI): Addressing the *Gee-Whiz* Argument

I have noticed that certain EI enthusiasts—coaches, authors, lecturers in the area—will try to impress listeners (or readers) with what I'll call the *gee-whiz argument* for EI. That argument goes something like this:

Gee whiz! EI is important—consider these findings:

- Mischel and Ebbeson found evidence that impulse control in children predicts later academic performance.
- McClelland and colleagues found that the need for achievement predicts success in starting new companies.
- Seligman found that optimism predicts better performance in sales.

Various studies find that happier college students often perform better in school.

Given the above findings, emotional intelligence exists and is important.

Often, when making such an argument, the advocate is describing genuinely important findings by eminent researchers. The problem arises with the way the studies are combined and interpreted.

For example, each of the four above descriptions of studies (and I'm sorry, I didn't have a chance to add in specific references for this example) uses entirely different, uncorrelated measures, to measure entirely different traits. The Gee-Whiz EI argument, however, is based on one of the popularized, broad EI definitions, and lumps all the different findings together as if they made the same point.

In reality, the logic of the Gee-Whiz argument revealed, is something like this:

The logic, in the abstract, of the Gee-Whiz argument:

- Study 1 uses measure A of Trait B to predict an important life outcome, outcome C—and that's important.
- Study 2 uses measure D of Trait E to predict an important life outcome, outcome F—and that's important.
- Study 3 uses measure G of Trait H to predict an important life outcome, outcome I—and that's important.
- Study 4 uses measure J of Trait K to predict an important life outcome, outcome L—and that's important.
- Measures A, D, G, and J, and Traits B, E, H, and K can all be combined—wow that must be important!

People who use the gee-whiz EI argument fail to recognize that one can't make an argument about a coherent thing—emotional intelligence—by combining together studies that use different, often uncorrelated, measures that assess different traits that predict different outcomes.

One could use the above evidence to make the claim that a number of important relationships exist in psychology among various measures and important outcomes. One could further make the claim that there are a number of important psycho-socio-emotional relationships in life. One cannot, however, claim that EI is important, just because some popular-press definition of the concept is so broad as to include

just about every social, emotional, and psychological variable studied by personality and social psychologists!

Consider the following analogy as a way of making this still clearer. Let's say that one wished to claim that Vitamin X was a powerful new vitamin. An appropriate method of proving this would be to study valid measures of Vitamin X that defined Vitamin X in the same, specific manner, and then to use those measures to see what high and low levels of Vitamin X predicted.

To continue with the analogy, the EI proponent above, however, would in this case claim that Vitamin X can be defined as including Vitamin A, B, D, and K (but, arbitrarily, not C). Each of those vitamins predict important health benefits, therefore Vitamin X is the most powerful of them all! The problem is that Vitamin X is left as ill-defined. In fact, it isn't anything at all. It would, of course, be okay to say that vitamins as a whole are important, just as, above, it is reasonable to say that personality or psychological variables as a whole are important.

One cannot conclude, however, that Vitamin X is important, because it is just a sloppy way of referring to several quite different vitamins.

Similarly, one cannot conclude that EI is important from the Gee-Whiz argument, unless one is willing to label all of psychology the study of EI. I don't think most psychologists would find that useful.

Psychological terms may not be perfect, but they have been developed by very smart, analytic people over the course of more than a century, and they are much better, on the whole, than the popular definitions of EI.

Of course, there are ways to make a more sophisticated argument for EI. Such an argument would define EI clearly in a single fashion (as I do on this web site, for example -- as an ability involving four areas of skills). Such an argument would then go on to identify a measure or class of correlated measures (such as the MEIS, and MSCEIT) that employ the same measurement approach (ability-testing of a group of related, clearly defined, areas of emotional skills), and then see what those measures predict. That is what the research program with the MEIS, MSCEIT, and related measures is all about. Using that approach, EI turns out to exist, and to be important, but the picture that develops is quite different than what one gets from the Gee-Whiz approach described above. (The best summary to-date of EI as defined and measured as an ability, can be found in Mayer, Salovey & Caruso, 2004).

Can Self-Report Measures Contribute to the Study of Emotional Intelligence? A Conversation with Joseph Ciarrochi

Editor's note: The conversation below concerns the relative merits of ability-testing and self-report testing of emotional intelligence and related traits. The conversation was constructed from e-mails between Joseph Ciarrochi, a psychology professor at the University of Wollongong, Australia, and myself while we were editing the 2nd edition of the book, *Emotional Intelligence in Everyday Life*, along with our coeditor Joe Forgas (see Mayer, Ciarrochi, & Forgas, 2000; 2006).

The conversation helps clarify, I believe, a number of important points about the use of different kinds of data in a more lively way than an academic article otherwise might. Joseph and I have reviewed the conversation and it is posted with both of our agreement.

Is Self-Report Data Worth Using in Psychological Science?

Joseph Ciarrochi: I think a number of the arguments you make about the superiority of ability measurement in emotional intelligence seems to taint well-validated and useful self-report measures. They are depicted as inaccurate or measures of the extent that people have positive illusions or whatever. I think this is too critical.

Anyway, I sometimes think that you disparage all the self-report work over the last 4 decades (this is probably not an accurate impression, but it is how it feels). I don't think this is good. We've come too far. The last four decades of research utilizing self-reports has helped us to understand why people suffer. We are getting to the point where maybe we can reduce human suffering. The evidence is coming in...

John D. Mayer: In regard to measuring emotional intelligence: I am a great believer that criterion-report (that is, ability testing) is the only adequate method to employ. Intelligence is an ability, and is directly measured only by having people answer questions and evaluating the correctness of those answers.

I am, however, a great defender of self-judgment data for other purposes. For example, you mentioned that self-judgment has allowed us to get a handle on why and how people suffer, and I agree entirely with that position. I think self-judgment data represents the single best approach to measuring personal emotional states and their outcomes.

Should the term Self-Report Data be Replaced?

Mayer (Cont.): Like you, I feel strongly about the potential contributions of many kinds of data to our field. I do think, however, that the *term* self-report data has now been so misused that we are better off dropping it. For example, the term self-report data has been used as a contrast to ability data (also known as criterion-report data, and at other times, the term self-report is used in a way that includes ability data.

I have helped promote the use of different kinds of data -- including what is often referred to as self-report data -- by developing a new language and classification system for them in a 2004 article. Here is a part of the opening of that article, in which I discuss use of the term, self-report (from Mayer, 2004, p. 208).

...the term, "self-report data" is widely used in two substantially different ways but without clear acknowledgement of the different definitions. Self-report data is sometimes defined as any report by the self, including answers to questions such as "Is nuclear power safe?", "Did you visit the hospital last year?", and responses to Rorschach inkblots (e.g., Bordens & Abbott, 2002, p. 135; Heiman, 2002, p. 284; Shaugnessy, Zechmeister, & Zechmeister, 2003, p. 150). Alternatively, self-report is defined more specifically as a report by the self on the self -- limited to answers to questions such as "Do you like parties" and "Are you a nervous person?" (e.g., Kaplan & Saccuzzo, 2001, p. 406).

I think the self-report term is overly vague. Such a vague term probably does more harm than good in a scientific context. When people criticize self-report, it often takes advantage of this vagueness. For example:

...some psychologists have criticized self-report data as involving "deliberate faking, lack of insight, and unconscious defensive reactions" (Mischel, 1968. p. 236). Surely,

however, self-reports such as “I am 20 years old,” or “I am female” are trustworthy in many contexts. (Mayer, 2004, pp. 216-217).

To help improve this situation, I have introduced a new model for organizing personality data—which promotes many different kinds of self-report data (divided into conceptually clearer categories). I go on to write:

One of the major points of this classification system is that the different categories of data are different because they are produced differently -- and that has implications for what the data mean. For example, whether the data's source is external or internal to personality makes a theoretical difference -- as does whether the person is simply endorsing an item, constructing a convergent response to meet a criterion, or constructing divergent and thematic responses. A person's endorsements of an extroversion item reflects that person's self-concept and draws on relatively stable memories of the self. Such self-concept data can be expected to be meaningfully different from, say, a person's freely-generated self-descriptions in which a person must create a narrative description of him or herself... Similarly, self-reports correlate only weakly with observer reports in a variety of areas (e.g., Funder, 1995; Paulhus, Lysy, Yik, 1998).

Why Are Different Sources of Data on the same Trait (e.g., Emotional Intelligence) Weakly Related?

Ciarrochi: Ok, Jack here is the crucial point where we differ. I don't know how you define “weakly” but again these arguments are suggesting that self-reports are just measuring “self-concepts” and are not connected to the “real” world. Let me disagree in the strongest terms.

Mayer: Well, wait a minute now, to say that self-judgment data correlates only moderately with, say, thematic (projective) data or criterion-report (ability) data doesn't mean that it doesn't predict important things. My whole point is that any or all of the kinds of data predict important things—but that they are measuring different things, and as a consequence, are often predicting different things. Consider the last part of the passage from the article:

Each data source, from this perspective, is a strong indicator of a better-specified variable [i.e., outcome criterion—Ed]. This is a more powerful way to view data in personality, achieved through advances in understanding cognitive and emotional processes, and the behavior of the data itself. The challenge is that researchers must better keep in mind the data and what they specifically mean, and choose the right source(s) of data for a given research study (Mayer, 2004, pp. 216-217).

Ciarrochi: Okay, but let's use a specific as an example. In research I am working on, we find that self-reported social competence is a very good predictor of how socially competent people behave when interacting with a stranger (using -- as a criterion measure -- a behavioral measure and consensus scoring system). So the self-report measure is predicting between 16 to 25 % of the variance in a 5 minute sample of behavior (the behavior is rated by independent raters using Funder's *Riverside Behavioral Q-sort*)... This is a substantial effect. ...so this is an example of very strong evidence that self-reports can be accurate, not just “impressions.”

Mayer: Okay, you'll notice my phrasing above concerning self-report and observer data—that they “correlate only weakly in a variety of areas.” There, I cite David Funder's really excellent work, and I acknowledge (here, as I might have done there) that his work also shows that in some areas—particularly in areas of observable social behavior—the relationship is substantially higher, reaching to levels that are

fairly characterized as moderate (e.g., in the $r = .40$ to $.50$ level). This still indicates, to me, that the different sorts of data are measuring different things. But it is true that, at least at the $r = .50$ level, one can start to entertain the idea that there is some meaningful overlap.

Ciarrochi: So, when you say self-report is weakly linked to observer ratings, I think our finding challenges the claim. David Funder also has other findings that consistently challenge the claim.

Mayer: My point was to say that the meaning of what is measured by observations and by self-judgments is different. Observable behavior expressed by personality is something different from an individual's internal mental representation. Often, they are weakly related, and, as you and, more generally, Funder's research, rightly point out, sometimes, the two are moderately related.

Ciarrochi: Now, I can agree with you that, yes, IQ tests and self-judgment IQ are, at best, only weakly related, but it does not follow that this is true across all domains at all times.

Mayer: In many respects, Funder's approach to data and my own are similar. We both believe that different measures provide us with different kinds of information.

Ciarrochi: Well, okay, so we agree that part of the reason for the smallish links between self-judgment and observer reports is not because of problems with the self-judgment.

Actually, we have also found that the observer reports are somewhat unreliable and biased for various reasons (e.g., people don't always see their friends in an honest light). When we use trained observers who do not know the participant, we obtain much stronger links between self-reports and behavior than when we use friends. In other words, our neutral observers are more accurate assessors of the participant than are the people who actually know the participant well.

The Need for a Theory of Data

Mayer: What is really exciting to me is the improvement in research quality possible from better understanding our sources of data. When I talk about different kinds of data drawing on different sorts of mental processes, I do mean, yes, that psychologists have been developing a theory of data over time and we should use what we know. As you point out, if we are talking about readily observable social behavior, then self-judgment and observer reports may converge at moderate levels.

If, on the other hand, we are talking about intelligence, different issues apply. For reasons I have written about extensively (the problem of unperceptive observers, the problem of the plasticity of intelligence, the issue that intelligence is a very internal, hidden process, and the issue of over- and under- self-confidence), it appears that neither self-judgment nor (untrained) observer judgments correlate well with real performance, when we are talking about intelligence. Well then, this is a hard-won empirical fact about intelligence data that needs to be acknowledged. So, my theory of data—and, I also think Funder's work—both advocate drawing on what we have understood about our data. In the case of direct measures of EI, that includes that ability-based IQ is a far better predictor of being able to solve a set of mental problems than is self-judgment.

Consider the following two hypothetical test instruments—one self-judgment and one criterion-report (ability oriented).

For each test, a person answers a series of problems—"How much does a specific face express happiness?" "What does "anger" mean?" and the like. At the conclusion of the self-judgment test, the person is asked, "How well did you do?" and his or her answer is taken as the final measure of emotional intelligence ability. For the ability/criterion-report version of the test, however, the person's responses to

the same items are compared to a criterion of correctness, and scored as correct or incorrect. Which test would you trust more? The ability test adds tremendous value -- by checking responses for their veracity.

Ciarrochi: Again, you give an example where self-judgments are not likely to be useful. Above I have given an example of where they are very useful. So I think you need to evaluate this claim on an area-by-area basis. Sometimes self-judgments will be better predictors of the outcomes of interest. Sometimes they will link to behavior in theoretically expected ways. Sometimes they won't.

Yes, I agree the ability measures add tremendous value for emotional intelligence. But this is not a zero sum game. When one starts looking at overt social behaviors, then self-judgments and observer-report data can be valuable in another way for measuring some of the core social behaviors that are in an individual's repertory.

They also can both be accurate. One is not the truth (i.e., ability), whereas the other is just impressions (self-judgment). Sometimes, in some cases, that might be true. But you can not generalize to every instrument, in every context.

Mayer: I agree they are (if well measured) both truths—but not necessarily truths about emotional intelligence. Overt social behavior is overt social behavior. Is it important? Yes. Is it important for key social outcomes such as leadership or a person's well-being? Absolutely. Such social behavior is, first and foremost, however, social behavior. To the degree that it relates to internal mental processes, it is (so far as I see it) most correlated with key socioemotional and features of the social actor such as warmth, tact, extroversion, and many other qualities. Indeed, emotional intelligence no doubt contributes as well.

The empirical research that indicates that those measures are largely uncorrelated with the MSCEIT tells us, however, that the general social intelligence, informed though it may be by emotional intelligence, contains much, much more than emotional intelligence. Much of that social behavior contains socio-emotional styles, such as extroversion, warmth, and non-verbal styles, but styles that are predominantly independent of emotional intelligence -- as I define it -- that is, as a mental ability -- in the aspects that can be judged by, say, peer raters.

Ciarrochi: Jack, I think your arguments are compelling, and I agree with them. I think it is crucial to find ways of talking about emotional intelligence that make things clearer, rather than confusing the issue. I therefore propose we distinguish between two related phenomena, "emotional intelligence" and "emotionally intelligent behavior." Emotional intelligence refers to people's ability to process emotions and deal effectively with them. EI refers to people's potential. In contrast, "emotionally intelligent behavior" refers to how effectively people actually behave in the presence of emotions and emotionally charged thoughts. Simply put, emotionally unintelligent behavior occurs when emotions impede effective (value congruent) action, and emotionally intelligent behavior occurs when emotions do not impede effective action, or when emotions facilitate effective action. Emotional intelligence (as an ability) is one set of processes hypothesized to promote emotionally intelligent behavior. There are other potential processes, many of which are discussed in my chapter (EI in everyday life, 2nd edition).

Mayer and Ciarrochi: So, here are some take-home messages we think worth considering:

- New classification systems for data argue that self-report, as a term, ought to be dropped (e.g., Mayer, 2004).
- There are a number of discretely different kinds of data. Each kind of data reflects different mental (or, in the case of observers, observational) processes. Moreover, each kind of data can contribute differently to understanding a phenomenon.

- If you want to look at mental potential around emotional intelligence, then criterion-report (that is, ability measures) are best; self-judgment measures are weak criteria at best.
- Self-judgments measure just that -- a person's self-efficacy in regard to emotional intelligence, as distinct from their actual emotional intelligence.
- If you want to predict and increase emotionally intelligent behavior, then you may need to focus on processes beyond EI (defined as an ability). For example, you may need to focus on situational factors (see Zeidner and Forgas chapters, in *EI in Everyday Life (2nd edition only)*), or other individual difference processes (See other chapters in *EI in Everyday Life*).
- If you want to understand how a person is perceived in a social context, that is, how warm, emotionally expressive or socially skilled they are, then observer-report is good, and self-judgment can provide a reasonable proxy.
- If you want to understand how a person is feeling inside, then, self-judgment measures are best.

Emotional Intelligence: Why Use Self-Report Measures At All?

The following discussion is based on an edited set of e-mails among Joseph Ciarrochi, John Mayer and John Michela. Some of these were posted on the *emonet* list serve, originally at www.business.uq.edu.au/research/emonet/ They are posted with the permission of the contributors.

The three contributors to the conversation and their positions (at the time of the exchange):

Joseph Ciarrochi, Associate Professor at the University of Wollongong, Australia.

John Mayer, Professor of Psychology at the University of New Hampshire, United States.

John Michela, Associate Professor of Industrial/Organizational Psychology at the University of Waterloo, Canada.

This discussion is a continuation of an earlier e-mail exchange concerning ability measures and self-report measures on EMONET (not posted here). After reviewing that discussion, John Michela posted the opening question here...

John Michela: I agree that there is going to be some overlap of self-report with a valid measure of ability, but why use the imprecise self-report if something is available that measures the ability directly?

Joseph Ciarrochi: I think this is the important question....and it has been troubling many people (including myself) for a while.

I would first suggest that if two measures do not correlate, this does not mean that one measure is less accurate than the other. Rather, the two measures may be reflecting different latent processes. That is, they could both be accurate but measuring different things.

John Mayer: Can you explain why are you speaking here about latent variables rather than just plain old variables?

Ciarrochi: The idea is that you have observed variables (the answers people provide on a measure) and latent variables (the underlying psychological process that is presumed to cause the observed variables).

“Latent” is a great word in conveying the inferred nature what we measure. It helps to avoid two logical errors when evaluating measurement models (e.g., Kline, 2005):

The naming fallacy just because a particular latent variable is assigned a particular label -- e.g., EI, social skill -- does not mean that the hypothetical construct is understood or correctly named. ... “verbal labels should be viewed as conveniences and not substitutes for critical thinking.”

The reification fallacy the belief that a hypothetical construct must correspond to a real thing.

Ciarrochi (continued): Selecting and choosing between self-reports and ability based measures is more complex than first seems. You first need to ask the question, “what is the purpose of the measure?” That is, why are we using them? There seem to be three major purposes of EI measures.

The first is prediction and selection... this one is real important to you organizational folks. For example, you often want to be able to select the best possible managers. Failing to do so can cost you much money and time. So when your purpose is prediction, you often ask the question, does EI predict variance in performance over and above personality, IQ, and other traditional organizational measures. I am not sure what the answer to this question is, but at present it looks like ability based measures of EI are fairly distinctive from traditional organizational measures (though the data is still coming in). David Rosete in my lab, and people in Jack Mayer and Peter Salovey’s lab, and Susan David in Australia, and many others out there... , are finding that the MSCEIT predicts variance over and above personality and IQ. I am not so sure about self-report EI measures. They don’t seem to be doing as well, though again, the full evidence is not in yet.

Mayer: In the case of emotional intelligence measures, because you are measuring an ability, I believe you can make an a priori judgment, a presumptive judgment, that ability measures will have far superior validity. This gets back to John Michela’s point -- “Why not just use an ability measure where one exists?”.

Writing recently in *Psychological Review*, Borsboom et al. (2004) offer an interesting perspective on validity, in which they have observed that most central way to assess test validity—indeed, perhaps the only relevant criterion for test validity is, “... if (a) the [mental] attribute exists and (b) variations in the attribute causally produce variation in the measurement outcomes” (Borsboom, et al., 2004, p. 1061).

They elaborate that, central to determining this causal relationship between the psychological entity and the test score is a good understanding of the mental qualities or processes involved, and how they might bring about alterations in test scores in the instrument under consideration.

Central to our understanding of mental ability is that it “causes” correct answers on criterion-report/ability-report scales. Central to our understanding of alexithymia -- or any more direct measure of emotional intelligence measured specifically by self-report—is that self-judgment measures an individual’s self-concept. A person’s self-concept, in the case of ability, is one step removed from the actual ability. Since actual ability can be directly assessed, it ought to be for the best results.

It is for these reasons that I believe one can make a presumptive judgment that a criterion-report/ability-report scale can measure emotional intelligence and a self-judgment scale cannot do so as well -- if at all. Of course, if other findings seriously undermined that position, well, that would be another matter. I haven’t seen that, though.

Ciarrochi: Okay... The second reason we employ such scales, though, is *influence*.

This goal is about intervening to help people engage in more emotionally intelligent behavior (defined below). When influence is your primary goal, EI-relevant measures are only useful if they help guide the intervention.

A measure may not predict unique variance in behavior, but nevertheless may be useful in guiding an intervention. For example, let's say the following model is "true".

Self-reported difficulty identifying feelings (alexithymia) leads to negative affect, which, in turn, leads to counterproductive workplace behaviors.

In this model, if you wanted to predict counterproductive behavior, your best predictor would be negative affect. Alexithymia would predict no unique variance. However, if you wanted to reduce counterproductive behavior, it is a different story. You could try to directly reduce negative affect (which I have argued elsewhere is often difficult). Or you could seek to increase the ability of the person to identify emotions, and this would lead to decreases in negative affect and decreases in counterproductive behavior. So the alexithymia measure could be used both to evaluate who might need your intervention, and to evaluate the extent the intervention is actually working.

A third purpose of EI-relevant measures is to assess "ability" or potential. There is a lot of controversy about whether self-report measures assess ability (do people really know their own ability?), or are assessing typical functioning, or assessing self-concept not connected to anything in the "real" world. My guess is that they assess typical functioning, rather than what one is capable of....

Mayer: My impression is that there is less controversy in that regard; I think people recognize that self-judgments are just that. A further comment -- I don't believe the typical versus maximal (or optimal) performance distinction is a terribly clear one. First, ability tests do capture effort in test-taking, but I think "maximal" overstates most test-takers' investment in taking the test. In fact, I suspect they measure something closer to typical ability.

Ciarrochi: This sounds like a great future study. You can look at whether people can be motivated to perform better on EI tests like the MSCEIT.

Mayer: Hofstee (2001, p. 43) tells us that Cronbach (1949) introduced the terms typical and maximal performance, and "did not even bother to define intelligence and personality apart from this distinction and simply subsumed them under the difference in method". Since then those who use such terms associate "typical" with personality, and "maximal" with intelligence. Hofstee (2001, p. 46) has raised the point that it is also possible to measure maximal personality and typical intelligence, but I think it is clearer and more accurate to speak of self-judged versus ability measures.

Anyway, can you give us an example of where ability and self-judgment scales overlap and where there would be any controversy?

Ciarrochi: Here is an example. The MSCEIT measures "difficulty identifying emotions." The Taylor Alexithymia Scale (TAS) is a self-report measure that also assesses difficulty identifying emotions. The two scales barely correlate. I would say that this is because they index different valid constructs, rather than the self-report being inaccurate. How do I know? The TAS-20 scale has an incredible amount of validity evidence associated with it. For a review (e.g., Taylor, 2000). For example, alexithymia predicts who is likely to die young, who is likely to develop emotional disorders, who is likely to somaticize, get physically ill, etc. It predicts clinician ratings of alexithymia. Finally, alexithymia predicts important variance over and above positive and negative affectivity, self-esteem, hope, and other constructs. (We are finding these results in 8th graders and university students for example.)

So... One cannot ignore the mass of evidence around self-reported difficulty identifying emotions... It is a reliable, useful, and distinctive measure. (That is what the evidence says now.)

Mayer: You seem to be implying that there could be two different sorts of measures -- uncorrelated -- that both assess EI. How could that be?

Ciarrochi: You are right!! They can't be assessing the same thing. Maybe we should not call everything "EI." I suggest a very particular way of using EI (when the assumption is that the measure is assessing ability), which I think is 100% compatible with what you are saying. For other variables, I suggest we talk about them as indexing processes that promote emotionally intelligent behavior (EIB). These processes may or may not be related to EI, as defined by you and me. (The term "processes" is commonly used in clinical and intervention research, so I think it is a good word.)

Ciarrochi (continued): Now, on another note, we have conducted a study with managers, using the alexithymia scale and the MSCEIT. David Rosete and I find that it is the MSCEIT perceiving emotions scale that is the powerful predictor of managerial effectiveness. Indeed, we have observed perhaps the largest MSCEIT related effect in the literature (explaining over 20% of variance in behavior). So I am a fan of the MSCEIT. In contrast, The alexithymia scale does not predict performance. Thus, If we are talking about managerial performance, I would prefer the MSCEIT to the alexithymia scale. (But the evidence is still coming in.)

Michela: The research described by Joseph suggests that the difference between self-report measures in that research and the MSCEIT is that the self-report measures are, indeed, about the self and the MSCEIT is about others. Management is about dealing with other people. Vastly overstated, depression etc. are about dealing with yourself. MSCEIT thus may be more about dealing with other people. The self-report measures seem to be about the self. In providing self-report data, people may be rather unable to assess, judge, and rate their effects on other people; maybe they just don't know (typically, not in every case). But the MSCEIT items may assess the abilities that end up being consequential in their effects on other people and how they deal with other people. Ergo MSCEIT is seen to be associated with social performance (management), self-report with self-performance (self-management of well-being).

Ciarrochi: The fallacy I am trying to avoid is that just because two things have been given the same name does not mean that 1) they are the same or 2) they must relate. (I think we should avoid giving things the same name, but, hey, that is beyond my control, because I don't make tests and measures). If two things with the same name do not relate, it does not follow that one thing is "accurate" and one thing is not accurate.

Ciarrochi: My solution to this controversy is as follows (and I say this most humbly knowing it could be wrong). We need to distinguish between emotional intelligence (EI) proper (as an ability) and emotionally intelligent behavior (EIB). Simply put, emotionally unintelligent behavior occurs when emotions impede effective action, and emotionally intelligent behavior occurs when emotions do not impede effective action, or when emotions facilitate effective action. Emotional intelligence (as an ability) is one set of processes hypothesized to promote emotionally intelligent behavior. There are other potential processes, many of which may be assessed by self-report measures (I review these in my chapter for the second edition of EI in everyday life).

Mayer: I agree with the idea that we need descriptions of how people behave, but what about just "effective social or socio-emotional functioning?" My concern is, how do we identify intelligence functioning—of any kind, cognitive or emotional? The whole point is that intelligent, including emotionally-intelligent, functioning can be clever, strategic, and plastic. So, it is difficult to create a

benchmark for it. One must identify the individual's goals, and know whether they are aiming for short or long-term solutions, and the like.

Ciarrochi: This is indeed difficult, but I think worthwhile. Already, there is substantial research on how to identify people's personal goals and strivings. (See, for example, the work of Higgins and Sheldon and others.) This research has focused on why people do what they do (i.e., are they intrinsically or extrinsically oriented), on what goals they find to be important, and to what extent they have achieved the important goals. People are not always good at achieving important goals, and often see their emotions and emotionally charged thoughts as the barriers to these goals (see Hayes et al., 1999). For example, people might say they are "too anxious" to meet new people (a valued direction). Or they might say they want to be a more respectful boss, but they just get "too angry" to act effectively. In these instances, emotions act as barriers to effective action (and this could be classified as emotionally unintelligent behavior). In other instances, people might be able to have their anxiety *and* meet new people, have their anger *and* deal effectively with their employees (more emotionally intelligent behavior).

Research is needed to better understand emotionally intelligent behavior (and its value as a term). I think such research would be worthwhile. (By the way, clinicians have no trouble getting this term. They are constantly seeing clients who are telling them their sadness or anxiety or anger gets in the way of what they want to do. I think the same thing happens with nonclinical groups.)

Ciarrochi (cont.): There is a lot of really valuable work out there that I think is focusing on processes that lead to emotionally intelligent behavior. Offhand, I think of the work of Richard Boyatzis, Bill Ickes, Saarni, Elias, and others (I know there are many others). Other people, such as Ziedner, Mathews, and Roberts, have examined situational influences on emotionally intelligent behavior... Some great work...

So I think we should only use "emotional intelligence" when we are making the assumption that our test is tapping into an ability. We should maybe say processes that are hypothesized to promote emotionally-intelligent behavior if we don't want to assume that the processes reflect an ability...

Does the Systems Framework for Personality Psychology (SFPP) Represent the "Next Phase" of Emotional Intelligence Research?

A colleague recently e-mailed me to ask if the Systems Framework for Personality Psychology represented a new direction in emotional intelligence research. In response, I have written this brief comment.

I believe that, were people in the field of emotional intelligence to familiarize themselves with the SFPP and integrate it in their thinking, it would place the field of emotional intelligence on a sounder scientific footing. That would channel the wonderful energy of the emotional intelligence area, so that it could more effectively make contributions to science and public health.

What is the Systems Framework for Personality Psychology (SFPP)?

The Systems Framework for Personality Psychology, or SFPP, is a new, contemporary approach to the discipline of personality psychology. Today, two other approaches to the discipline of personality psychology are also in use. One approach provides an overview of the field of personality by examining, in turn, such theoretical perspectives as the psychodynamic, behavioral, social cognitive, and humanistic. A second approach discards much or all such theoretical perspectives, for a focus on a specific research topics such as the Big Five personality traits.

The SFPP provides a means of integrating personality psychology's history with its present research. In other words, the SFPP allows for a coherent overview of the personality system. The Systems Framework can be described very simply. In fact, at an introductory level, it makes one central statement: The study of personality can be divided conveniently into four areas:

- Where personality is located and what it is,
- what the main parts of personality are,
- how personality is organized, and,
- how personality develops (Mayer, 1994, 1998).

Here are some reasons I believe that the Systems Framework is important to Emotional Intelligence Researchers

I believe that many of the characteristics of individuals that EI researchers are interested in have more to do with human personality, generally speaking, than with EI specifically. For example, Daniel Goleman's (1995) popularization of emotional intelligence certainly represented the original theory that I developed with Peter Salovey, but it also added in many other aspects -- zeal, persistence, character, and the like -- which are more generally legitimate parts of personality. In a sense, you could say that Goleman's model represents an anticipation of the renewed importance now attributed to personality characteristics by the field of psychology. Certainly, looking at important personality traits such as zeal, persistence, and motivation plainly predicts something important. He is right about that.

If these things are legitimate parts of personality, but not of EI per se (considered as an ability), it makes all the sense in the world to return to the study of personality psychology.

The educators and researchers at www.casel.org, for example, have embarked on an impressive new examination of how programs in social and emotional learning and education may contribute to student and school well-being. They have dropped the EI terminology, to a great extent, recognizing that it does not adequately serve as an umbrella concept for their work. They have replaced it with some serious research -- which is wonderful. Ultimately, however, some guiding principles and guiding terminology is of importance. Although EI could never provide that (it is one variable, as described here), the SFPP can provide such a language.

How does the Systems Framework for Personality Psychology contribute?

I think many people, particularly psychologists involved in the EI area, know that they are working in the area of personality psychology but would prefer not to acknowledge that. Their quite legitimate concern is that most other people are not going to be very interested in their work given that the discipline of personality psychology is often identified as a succession of older theories (e.g., psychodynamic, humanistic), or as a collection of unintegrated research topics (e.g., traits, defenses). I don't believe either approach is a good way to represent a science.

The discipline of personality psychology, however, is undergoing a renaissance. The Systems Framework of Personality Psychology can reflect and convey that new spirit. It presents a very contemporary view of the personality system. It allows for an integrated view, along with a coherent, consensual language for the discipline of personality psychology. The language, methods, and research tools already used in the field of EI are quite consistent with the language developed in the SFPP. At the same time, the SFPP, because it is a formal system for organizing knowledge about how human personality (e.g., character) operates, can clarify thinking in the area. Using the coherent, pan-theoretical language of the SFPP should

permit the channeling of the energy in the EI area to study matters of importance in personality psychology.

Summary, for Now

I believe the Systems Framework for Personality Psychology can greatly enrich the field of EI by providing a framework for the study of many variables of interest -- including emotional intelligence proper, but also zeal, persistence, and social skills. The SFPP provides a way to combine many such personality traits in a conceptually clear way, relative to working without such an organizational guide.

On the other hand, the SFPP is a framework. It is a way of thinking and organizing a scientific field of study more so than a research area in-and-of-itself. So, I believe it represents the next wave of conceptualization in the field of EI. That is, it can play an important role by helping to clarify concepts and language in ongoing research that used to be called EI research (some of which really is EI research). This next wave is likely to blend into a new and more invigorated personality psychology.

I will be adding more on how the Systems Framework can assist with work in EI, and how the SFPP and EI can enrich one another in the near future. For now, if you are interested in the Systems Framework, you also can visit the pages on this site related the *personality systems framework* (the name now used for the SFPP).

Is Emotional Intelligence Old Wine in New Bottles? A Conversation Between Frank Landy and John D. Mayer

Editor's note: From February 9th to 12th, 2004, in preparation for a forthcoming review he was working on concerning emotional intelligence, Frank Landy and I exchanged a number of e-mails regarding the nature of emotional intelligence, and whether it was a new concept. Here is a conversation between the two of us based in part on an edited version of that correspondence. It is posted with both our permissions.

Dr. Landy is author of *Work in the 21st Century: An Introduction to Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, with J. M. Conte. He is professor emeritus in Industrial and Organizational Psychology at Penn State University. Dr. Landy has been a visiting lecturer or researcher at Stanford University, Stockholm University, and Gothenburg University, among others. He has published numerous articles and textbooks. His research work has been funded by a number of government agencies, and (ED: At the time of this conversation) he is presently a member of SHL International.

Frank Landy: How is your model of emotional intelligence different than the initial speculation by Thorndike that there were many different ways to measure intelligence and that the typical measures of abstract intelligence of that time were insufficiently diverse?...Thorndike's point was that there were an almost infinite number of intelligences depending on stimulus content and experience -- which accounted for neural connections, the core of his associationist theory. As an aside, this opens the door for arguments in favor of tacit knowledge (or practical intelligence or procedural knowledge -- all much the same thing) as the foundation for emotional intelligence.

John (Jack) Mayer: Ours is a different approach, because I/we are more traditional in our view of intelligence, believing there to be genuinely different (but usually correlated) intelligences for different domains of information. We are not critiquing the intelligence establishment with our theory. Of course, if anyone says there are an infinite number of intelligences, then all new work would be a subset of that

person's statement, but the generalization (infinite intelligences) isn't the same as defining one, operationalizing it, and seeing what it does.

We take the term *emotional intelligence* very seriously—that is, to understand it as parallel to verbal intelligence, spatial intelligence, perceptual-organizational intelligence and the like, and to clearly define what does and does not constitute emotional information in that context.

One reason it took Peter Salovey and me so long to move from our 1990 piece through our theoretical increments of 1993 and 1995 (Mayer & Salovey, 1993; Mayer & Salovey, 1995) to our 1997 statement of the 4-branch model (Mayer & Salovey, 1997), was that we were seriously in search of new wine—a new intelligence. Of course, emotional intelligence wasn't totally new wine -- but it was wine that had almost never been tasted before, because the important precursors to our work were relatively obscure to most psychologists.

Landy: Which precursors are you talking about?

Mayer: Precursors from clinical literature on alexithymia (and repression), empathic sending and receiving ability, from non-verbal receiving and sending ability reviewed by Buck in 1980 or so, from the cognition and affect literature on creativity and judgment, and from research on aesthetics. This is off the top of my head. Many of these precursors are outlined in our 1990 article, and also in a 2004 review (Mayer, Salovey & Caruso, 2004; Salovey & Mayer, 1990).

Landy: What if you regressed the Big 5 (Actually, more like the Big 6 now that there is some agreement in partialing conscientiousness into detail-orientation and achievement motive, disposition (positive affect and negative affect), "g", and tacit knowledge against the MSCEIT? Do you think there would still be variance (other than error) unaccounted for?

Mayer: I have yet to see another test with an average correlation with the MSCEIT higher than .35 or so (this includes all personality scales, intelligence scales, and other emotional intelligence scales, and ability-based emotional creativity scales I have seen, taken individually).

Landy: Take the two (for the Big 5, and verbal intelligence). Assume they are independent, and that each has a 12% variance overlap with the MSCEIT (based on the .35 correlations). You're still explaining only 24% of the MSCEIT's reliable variance -- say a multiple R of .50 or so. That's not much using 6 ostensibly orthogonal tests to predict a test with an overall reliability above .90.

Mayer: Even regressing the Big Five against the MSCEIT doesn't do much better. For example, in Brackett's 2003 article with me, he showed that regressing all 5 of the Big Five against the MSCEIT yielded a multiple R of .38 (note that this is simply the R, rather than the R-squared). (By contrast, it was .75 with the EQ-i and .58 with the Schutte scale -- the latter scale was more highly predicted by a scale of well-being). So, yes, I believe the variance of emotional intelligence is genuinely different from that of earlier scales. I believe it to be potentially as discrete as the variance for, say, spatial intelligence. I don't think adding tests will do much in terms of accounting for more of the variance, other than capitalize on chance.

Landy: My larger question, of course, is that even if you do identify some unique variance, does it matter? As a differential psychologist, one might say it doesn't have to matter, it simply has to be (as in the periodic chart of the elements). But is the desire that of the taxonomist (differential psychologist); that is, to add another classification?

Mayer: I am content with theoretical validity as per the periodic chart. At the same time, I think that as new criteria for emotional intelligence are identified, there will be socially significant incremental validity demonstrated in several areas (as indicated in forthcoming validity reviews, e.g., Mayer, Salovey & Caruso, 2004).

Landy: As an applied psychologist, one must ask the question: Of course, you believe that it matters, not (just) that it “is” That is certainly the thrust of all commercially available instruments. We are not at the 1893 Exposition in Chicago when Cattell and Munsterberg wowed the audience with this new thing called a psychological test.

Mayer: My general understanding of the evolution of human cleverness suggests to me that it is fairly unlikely that one could find a fairly broad (e.g., characterized now by up to 15 or so tasks), unifactorial area of human ability, such as emotional intelligence, that isn’t important, and meaningfully so, for some purposes. Of course, we’ll need to continue to uncover evidence for how, and I accept that responsibility (and invite others’ assistance in doing so).

Landy: Again, to be theatrical, so what? What does it matter what the correlation is between the MSCEIT and big toe-nail thickness?

Mayer: As we learn more about the correlates, I think they will have some definable importance.

Landy: Where does that leave us for now? New wine in no bottles?

Mayer: My argument is that with the ability model, we have new wine, and some new bottles. What we don’t know as well as we would like yet, is what those who have been drinking this wine have been able to do, that others haven’t been able to do. But that is becoming clearer with the most recent research.

Landy: Well, should I concede the “old wine in new bottles” argument regarding emotional intelligence?

Mayer: Unfortunately, no, because that does reflect much of the activity that takes place in the field under the name, “emotional intelligence,” but that is mostly because many others using the term emotional intelligence are (from my standpoint) misusing it. Our 1997 statement of EI has nothing to do with the other EI theories out there (which are hodgepodes of earlier personality theories, with some overlap with our own model).

The next section returns to the issue of whether EI can be distinguished from other intelligences—Ed.

Landy: I am not sure I see the distinction -- after all Thorndike and possibly Bob Glaser and J. B. Carroll anticipated many different intelligences.

Mayer: It is one thing to anticipate that a multitude of new unspecified intelligences will be discovered in the future -- that isn’t much different than anticipating that science will make future discoveries.

In contrast, our theory provides a coherent and specific description of a previously unstudied domain of human abilities. I think there are multiple definitions and approaches to emotional intelligence. I think our own best represents the new wine.

I haven’t seen an earlier theoretical discussion that describes a chunk of human ability, that is similar to that of our 1997 paper (although, again, I grant the existence of plenty of important precursors; again, the closest and most important precursors were very obscure and remain so).

Please forgive me if have talked up our theory too much here, but I really can’t see how the old wine issue applies in this instance, and would invite you to instruct me if you still believe it does after reading this.

Landy: Very well put. Thanks. I have enjoyed our dialogue and it has (and will further) influence the way I think and write about EI, I hope in a way that will please you. I am yet to be convinced, at least in the employment domain, that EI has incremental validity over other measures. On the other hand, I would not argue that EI devices might not be more efficient at predicting certain work behaviors but my endorsement would be based on an efficiency notion, not (yet) that EI measures something unique.

Mayer: I have enjoyed the dialogue as well and I wish you luck with your forthcoming chapter on the area.

References Referred to on this Web Page

- Borsboom, D., Mellenbergh, G. J., van Heerden, J. (2004). *The concept of validity*. Psychological Review, 111, 1061-1071.
- Cronbach, L. J. (1949). *Essentials of psychological testing*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional intelligence*. New York: Bantam Books.
- Goleman, D. (1998). *Working with Emotional Intelligence*. New York: Bantam Books.
- Hayes, S. C., Strosahl, K. D., et al. (1999). *Acceptance and commitment therapy: An experiential approach to behavior change*. New York: The Guilford Press. (1999). xvi, 304 pp.
- Higgins, T. E. (1998). Promotion and Prevention: Regulatory Focus as a Motivational Principal. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 30, 535-541.
- Hofstee, W. K. B. (2001). Intelligence and personality: Do they mix? In J. M. Collis & S. Messick (Eds.), *Intelligence and personality: Bridging the gap in theory and measurement* (pp. 43-60). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.
- Kline, R. B. (2005). *Principles and practice of structural equation modeling (2nd ed.)*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Mayer, J. D. (1994). A systems-topics framework for the study of personality. *Imagination, Cognition, and Personality*, 13, 99-123.
- Mayer, J. D. (1998). A systems framework for the field of personality psychology. *Psychological Inquiry*, 9, 118-144.
- Mayer, J. D. (September, 1999). Emotional Intelligence: Popular or scientific psychology? *APA Monitor*, 30, 50. [Shared Perspectives column] Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Mayer, J. D., Caruso, D., & Salovey, P. (1999). Emotional intelligence meets traditional standards for an intelligence. *Intelligence*, 27, 267-298.
- Mayer, J. D., & Cobb, C. D. (2000). Educational policy on emotional intelligence: Does it make sense? *Educational Psychology Review*, 12, 163-183.
- Mayer, J. D., & Salovey, P. (1993). The intelligence of emotional intelligence. *Intelligence*, 17(4), 433-442.

- Mayer, J. D. & Salovey, P. (1997). What is emotional intelligence? In P. Salovey & D. Sluyter (Eds). *Emotional Development and Emotional Intelligence: Implications for Educators* (pp. 3-31). New York: Basic Books.
- Mayer, J. D., Salovey, P., & Caruso, D. R. (2000). Models of emotional intelligence. In R. J. Sternberg (Ed.). *Handbook of Intelligence* (pp. 396-420). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Mayer, J. D., Salovey, P., & Caruso, D. R. (2004). Emotional intelligence: Theory, research, and findings. *Psychological Inquiry*, 197-215.
- Salovey, P. & Mayer, J. D. (1990). *Emotional intelligence*. *Imagination, Cognition, and Personality*, 9, 185-211.
- Sheldon, K. M., & Kasser, T. (2001). "Getting older, getting better? Personal strivings and psychological maturity across the life span." *Developmental Psychology*, 37(4), 491-501.
- Taylor, G. J. (2000). Recent developments in alexithymia theory and research. *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 45, 134-142.