

A Critique of Emotional Intelligence. What are the problems and how can they be fixed?

Kevin R Murphy (ed.), 2006

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Disenchantment with the IQ test as the only means of measuring a person's abilities has led to broadening the concept of intelligence to include social intelligence, or multiple intelligences, or in this case emotional intelligence (EI). The past decade has seen an enormous drive in education and employment to make personality and emotional maturity significant criteria in selection and performance review within employment. This is also contributing to discussions about spirituality and 'spiritual intelligence' (Zohar and Marshall 2000, 2004). This applied psychology contribution provides a welcome check on whether the current EI industry has been tried and tested scientifically. Edited by Kevin Murphy of Penn State University, it incorporates the work of 26 academics in the field across 15 chapters, arranged under the themes:

I The Definition and Measurement of EI

II The Relationship between EI and other constructs

III The limits of EI

IV Improving EI research and applications.

The contributors do not work to an imposed agenda but are able to speak openly. The book affirms that study of the emotions is worthwhile, and developing emotional maturity will help people: but the agendas of testing for and measurement of EI are challenged, and the case (regarded as emotive rather than scientific) for saying that EI is an *intelligence* is generally denied. The book is essential reading for anyone working in or around this subject of emotional responses, and the possible relationships between emotions and spirituality. This review can only give a brief flavour of complex, dense and fully referenced arguments.

EI was first proposed in the scientific work of Salovey and Mayer in 1990, and further developed in Mayer and Salovey (1997). Popularised in a non-scientific augmented form by Daniel Goleman (1995, 1998) as a tool for identifying and developing business leaders, it became a 'fad' (p.353), a poorly defined 'bandwagon' based on unreasoned and unreasonable claims (pp. 41, 301). Bar-On (2000) preferred 'Emotional Quotient' (EQ) as a parallel for IQ and produced an extensive list of traits and intra-personal and inter-personal abilities to manage stress and mood. The purpose of this book is to salvage whatever might be demonstrable scientifically, and jettison the rest. It is therefore a significant work.

The controversy focuses on the word 'intelligence' and in particular the claim that EI is more significant than IQ and general intelligence (or *g*). Brody, in chapter 7, shows that general intelligence (*g*) is in research terms the only accurate predictor of performance. However, Spector and Johnson (chapter 14) argue: "To some extent, the debate over whether it is appropriate to call EI an intelligence ... is a rhetorical issue that distracts from the more important questions" (p.341), about understanding the emotions. Whether EI is measurable in any valid way, and can predict good performance, has been acrimoniously contested: the measurement scales of EI are held to be generally meaningless as they hide too much variation with over-broad criteria. The test answers are not true or false, but have to be based either on expert judgement or on a broad consensus. In other words answers

are judged right or wrong either by a panel of experts, or by focus groups. Such judgements are rarely unanimous (and we need to know of the disputes). This means that high scorers are conformists who give the usual answer, with brilliant non-conformists getting no credit. There may also be a tendency for experts to be white males, so that the tests favour white male responses.

Therefore the EI bandwagon is viewed as unscientific and ineffective in practical terms. Many of the Goleman and Bar-On criteria come from the 'Big Five' personality factors (emotional stability, agreeableness, extraversion, conscientiousness, openness to experience, p.72) so it is argued that using tried and tested personality instruments would be more valid. Questions are raised about whether self-report questionnaires are fakable, especially these tests offer advantage in job selection, and whether emotional qualities can be *developed*, as the EI literature asserts. At the scientific end, measures of EI 'abilities' are shown to be closely related to general measures of ability (in other words, IQ), with the best test said to be the MSCEIT version 2 (Mayer, Salovey, Carusso EI Test). Catherine Daus makes a case for an ability-based model of EI to allow affective factors to balance the cognitive. These involve emotion identification, assimilating emotions into thought, understanding emotion, and emotion management. She sees emotional abilities as separate from personality and cognitive tests and predicts a person with positive social relations and robust mental health.

This book exposes all the weaknesses of the Goleman model of EI and declares it ill-defined and bankrupt. It places cautious optimism in the scientific version of ability-based measurement that preceded Goleman (e.g. Mayer and Salovey) but suggests that it may be a while before development and testing produces worthwhile results. This is a long-term agenda, not a quick fix. The book finishes cautiously: "it is now time to see whether this line of inquiry will take us anywhere worth going" (p.354).

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