

Critique of Emotional Intelligence in Organizations

Nicolae Sfetcu

12.02.2020

Sfetcu, Nicolae, "Critique of Emotional Intelligence in Organizations", SetThings (February 12, 2020), URL = <https://www.setthings.com/en/critique-of-emotional-intelligence-in-organizations/>

Email: nicolae@sfetcu.com



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NoDerivatives 4.0 International. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/4.0/>.

A partial translation of:

Sfetcu, Nicolae, " Emoțiile și inteligența emoțională în organizații", SetThings (31 decembrie 2019), MultiMedia Publishing (ISBN 978-606-033-328-9), DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.32991.20640, URL = <https://www.setthings.com/ro/e-books/emotiile-si-inteligenta-emotionala-in-organizatii/>

Locke considers the concept of emotional intelligence to be invalid, both because it is not a form of intelligence, and because it is so broad and inclusive that it has no intelligible meaning. (Locke 2005) The extension of the term "intelligence" distorts the meaning of the concept. The final reason would be egalitarianism, so that everyone would be considered equal in intelligence. He sets the example of Mayer, (J. Mayer 1999, 50) who defines emotional intelligence (EI) as "the capacity to reason with emotion in four areas: to perceive emotion, to integrate it in thought, to understand it and to manage it", but to "reason with emotion" is a contradiction in terms. EI would not, in fact, be another form or type of intelligence, but intelligence (the ability to understand abstractions) applied to a particular domain, namely emotions. Locke finally wonders: since EI-

based leadership involves an extremely long list of characteristics associated with effective leadership, what does not include EI? One thing is missing from the list: real information!

Goleman argues that "The fundamental task of leaders is to create good feelings in those they lead", a statement considered false, as the function of organizations is to achieve goals, profitability for private organizations. (Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee 2002) Also, Goleman (Goleman 1995) is almost entirely confined to the brain structure, an incomplete approach to neurophysiology. (Bandura 1997)

Locke concludes about EI that:

1. The definition of the concept is constantly changing.
2. Most definitions are so comprehensive that they make the concept unintelligible.
3. Some definitions (for example, emotional reasoning) involve a contradiction.
4. There is no real emotional intelligence, although intelligence can be applied including emotions,

proposing to replace the term EI with the concept of introspective ability.

Eysenck states that Goleman's description of EI contains ungrounded assumptions about intelligence, even contrary to research methodology:

"[Goleman] exemplifies more clearly than most the fundamental absurdity of the tendency to class almost any type of behavior as an 'intelligence'... If these five 'abilities' define 'emotional intelligence', we would expect some evidence that they are highly correlated; Goleman admits that they might be quite uncorrelated, and in any case, if we cannot measure them, how do we know they are related? So the whole theory is built on quicksand: there is no sound scientific basis." (Eysenck 2000)

Locke states that EI should be re-labeled as an ability. (Locke 2005) Adam Grant warned of the wrong perception of EI as a right moral quality, so that EI is not only a tool for achieving the goals but can also function as a weapon for manipulating others. (Grant 2014) Landy argued

that EI has a small predictive value, due to a methodological problem, that the alternative explanations were not fully considered:

"EI is compared and contrasted with a measure of abstract intelligence but not with a personality measure, or with a personality measure but not with a measure of academic intelligence." (Landy 2005)

Other researchers have expressed concern about the correlation between self-reporting measures of EI with established personality dimensions. Roberts et al. criticizes the works of Mayer and Salovey, suggesting that EI measured by MSCEIT can only confirm compliance with the community, by consensus as the basis of the measurements. (Roberts, Zeidner, and Matthews 2001) Brody stated that MSCEIT "tests knowledge of emotions but not necessarily the ability to perform tasks that are related to the knowledge that is assessed," due to the possibility of unpredictable behavior in an emotionally charged situation. (Brody 2004) A bias found in EI measurements is the desirable social response, the false good defined as a pattern of response in which testers systematically exhibit excessive positive bias. This contaminates responses in self-report measurements.

EI can increase performance and productivity, (Cherniss, Adler, and Goleman 2000) but there is no independent and systematic analysis to confirm this statement. (Lam and Kirby 2002) Some critics have referred to EI more as "a myth than science." (Matthews, Zeidner, and Roberts 2002, 547) EI studies are more commercial literature than scientific research, (Davies, Stankov, and Roberts 1998) and other studies conclude that EI is just a new term for old concepts and measurement. (Van Rooy, Viswesvaran, and Pluta 2005)

Among the criticisms EI may include: (Côté 2014)

- Disagreement about the meaning of emotional intelligence - The structure of EI can be refined as new findings about emotions are made. (Van Kleef 2009) (Côté and Hideg 2011)

- How emotional intelligence relates to existing constructs - Small meta-analytical correlations between EI and other individual differences. (Joseph and Newman 2010)
- Validity of measurements of emotional intelligence. (Conte 2005)
- Dimensions of the effect for emotional intelligence - A way of assessing the importance of EI involves comparing the sizes of the meta-analytic effect of EI with the sizes of the effect of cognitive intelligence and personality traits. (Joseph and Newman 2010)
- Emotional intelligence can be learned - Evidence that EI can be improved is rare (Matthews, Zeidner, and Roberts 2002) (Landy 2005) or there is no EI. (Murphy 2006)
- Intercultural variations in emotional intelligence - EI research does not incorporate enough culture. (Matthews, Zeidner, and Roberts 2002) (Moon 2011) (Wong, Law, and Wong 2004)

Landy argues that research in the field of emotional intelligence is "outside the scientific tent" being a continuation of the discredited "social intelligence," referring to three aspects: there is no scientific examination of the measurements; the construct is rooted in the (discredited) concept of "social intelligence", and the research in emotional intelligence is based on weak models, without an incremental validity compared to the traditional models of personality and behavior. (Landy 2005) Emotional intelligence has been developed by commercial test providers, without critical scientific data. Goleman support his ideas through selective anecdotal evidence.

Locke argues that the construct is inadequate and even contradictory. For Locke, "emotional intelligence" seems like an oxymoron, and he claims that supporters of emotional intelligence seem to be motivated by a certain form of political agenda. (Locke 2005) (Van Rooy and Viswesvaran 2004) Locke suggests that a more fruitful area for research is "introspection", considered "an important human skill." Ashkanasy and Daus claim that Locke's views are

representative of an outdated model of organizational behavior, while modern theories of organizational behavior have evolved. (Ashkanasy and Daus 2005)

Conte criticizes the measurement of emotional intelligence. (Conte 2005) The main criticism of his argument is that he fails to give sufficient recognition to the primacy of Mayer and Salovey's definition of emotional intelligence, (J. D. Mayer and Salovey 1997) considering alternative models proposed by Goleman (Sala 2002) and Bar-On (Bar-On 2004) as legitimate alternatives. Ashkanasy and Daus criticize Conte for "comparing apples and oranges". (Ashkanasy and Daus 2005)

Hughes writes that "Sennett contrasts the Weberian image of individual workers trapped in the 'iron cage' of rationality, seeking to gain power over themselves through endlessly toiling to prove their moral virtue, with the ephemeral and superficial engagement characteristic of teamworking in the present-day workplace". (Hughes 2016, 99) "Teamworking helps obscure domination: it creates the illusion that no one has responsibility, and thus those in control are able to act without needing to justify themselves or their acts." Sennett observes a dissipation of ethics with an emphasis on authority, leading to a corrosion of the moral character. It follows that EI changes the characters, aligning them with the new work organization. (Sennett 2000)

Grugulis et al. states that this makes it more difficult for employees to support the boundaries between home and work, as managerial control is becoming more and more widespread and increasingly capturing all aspects of employees' lives. (Grugulis, Dundon, and Wilkinson 2016, 112) "The rise of EI may thus signal a further move towards more totalizing regimes of organizational domination in which employee identity becomes effectively subsumed within the workplace and opportunities for resistance are greatly limited." (Hughes 2016)

Through its (pseudo)scientific natural and social foundations, EI legitimizes an irresistible authority, harder to reject as mere "managerial rhetoric". (Fineman 2004)

Dulewicz and Higgs noted that, although the concept of EI is based on research evidence, EI's organizational applications "tend to be based on derivative arguments and largely anecdotal descriptions", (Dulewicz and Higgs 2000, 341) impressionist or collected by consulting companies and not published in the specialized literature. (Barrett 2017) The vision of EI as an emotional competence has not been clearly established and there are other, equally viable, conceptions measured by EI tests. (M. Zeidner, Matthews, and Roberts 2001) EI and its components should be differentiated from those related constructs, such as wisdom. (Izard 2001)

Ackerman demonstrated that intellectual knowledge is distinct from fluid and crystallized intelligences. (Ackerman 1996) Informal "tacit knowledge" could also be evaluated. (Sternberg and Grigorenko 2000) A science of EI requires the definition, number, type and range of primary emotional abilities within a formal psychometric model. (Moshe Zeidner, Matthews, and Roberts 2004)

An essential aspect in organizational EI is the precise identification of specific contexts, needs and goals. We may need different levels of analysis for the emotional demands of the jobs. As the theory of emotional competence becomes more fully articulated, a better theory-based analysis of emotional tasks in the workplace may be possible. The validation of an EI measurement requires convincing empirical and predictive evidence. Validation research addresses EI measurements by differentiating between low-performing and high-performing groups according to job specificity. What EI could predict over IQ is another unanswered question, as well as uncertainty about the causal role of EI in job success. Zeidner et al. concludes that organizations

using EI tests must carefully select the qualities and how they will influence the organization over shorter and longer periods. (Moshe Zeidner, Matthews, and Roberts 2004)

Daus and Ashkanasy reject the criticisms that emotional intelligence is dominated by opportunistic "consultants transformed into academics" who have accumulated much fame and wealth based on this concept; that the measurement of emotional intelligence is based on unstable instruments, psychometric defects, which have not demonstrated adequate discriminative and predictive validity to justify their use; and that there is weak empirical evidence that emotional intelligence is related to anything that is important in organizations. (Daus and Ashkanasy 2005)

Bibliography

- Ackerman, Phillip L. 1996. "A Theory of Adult Intellectual Development: Process, Personality, Interests, and Knowledge." *Intelligence* 22 (2): 227–57. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-2896\(96\)90016-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-2896(96)90016-1).
- Ashkanasy, Neal M., and Catherine S. Daus. 2005. "Rumors of the Death of Emotional Intelligence in Organizational Behavior Are Vastly Exaggerated." *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 26 (4): 441–52. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.320>.
- Bandura, Albert. 1997. *Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control*. Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control. New York, NY, US: W H Freeman/Times Books/ Henry Holt & Co.
- Bar-On, Reuven. 2004. "The Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i): Rationale, Description and Summary of Psychometric Properties." In *Measuring Emotional Intelligence: Common Ground and Controversy*, 115–45. Hauppauge, NY, US: Nova Science Publishers.
- Barrett, Lisa Feldman. 2017. *How Emotions Are Made: The Secret Life of the Brain*. Reprint edition. Mariner Books.
- Brody, Nathan. 2004. "What Cognitive Intelligence Is and What Emotional Intelligence Is Not." *Psychological Inquiry* 15 (3): 234–38.
- Cherniss, Cary, Mitchel Adler, and Daniel Goleman. 2000. *Promoting Emotional Intelligence in Organizations*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Talent Development.
- Conte, Jeffrey M. 2005. "A Review and Critique of Emotional Intelligence Measures." *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 26 (4): 433–40. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.319>.
- Côté, Stéphane. 2014. "Emotional Intelligence in Organizations." SSRN Scholarly Paper ID 2414419. Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network. <https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=2414419>.
- Côté, Stéphane, and Ivona Hideg. 2011. "The Ability to Influence Others via Emotion Displays: A New Dimension of Emotional Intelligence." *Organizational Psychology Review* 1 (1): 53–71. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2041386610379257>.

- Daus, Catherine S., and Neal M. Ashkanasy. 2005. "The Case for the Ability-Based Model of Emotional Intelligence in Organizational Behavior." *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 26 (4): 453–66. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.321>.
- Davies, M., L. Stankov, and R. D. Roberts. 1998. "Emotional Intelligence: In Search of an Elusive Construct." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 75 (4): 989–1015. <https://doi.org/10.1037//0022-3514.75.4.989>.
- Dulewicz, Victor, and Malcolm Higgs. 2000. "Emotional Intelligence: A Review and Evaluation Study." *Journal of Managerial Psychology* 15 (4): 341–72. <https://doi.org/10.1108/02683940010330993>.
- Eysenck, Hans. 2000. *Intelligence: A New Look*. New Brunswick, NJ: Routledge.
- Fineman, Stephen. 2004. "Getting the Measure of Emotion--And the Cautionary Tale of Emotional Intelligence." *Human Relations* 57 (6): 719–40. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726704044953>.
- Goleman, Daniel. 1995. *Emotional Intelligence*. Emotional Intelligence. New York, NY, England: Bantam Books, Inc.
- Goleman, Daniel, Richard Boyatzis, and Annie McKee. 2002. *Primal Leadership: Realizing the Power of Emotional Intelligence*. Primal Leadership: Realizing the Power of Emotional Intelligence. Boston, MA, US: Harvard Business School Press.
- Grant, Adam. 2014. "The Dark Side of Emotional Intelligence." *The Atlantic*. January 2, 2014. <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2014/01/the-dark-side-of-emotional-intelligence/282720/>.
- Grugulis, Irena, Tony Dundon, and Adrian Wilkinson. 2016. "Cultural Control and the 'Culture Manager': Employment Practices in a Consultancy." *Work, Employment and Society*, June. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09500170022118284>.
- Hughes, Jason. 2016. "Bringing Emotion to Work: Emotional Intelligence, Employee Resistance and the Reinvention of Character." *Work, Employment and Society*, June. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017005055675>.
- Izard, Carroll E. 2001. "Emotional Intelligence or Adaptive Emotions?" *Emotion* 1 (3): 249–57. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1528-3542.1.3.249>.
- Joseph, Dana L., and Daniel A. Newman. 2010. "Emotional Intelligence: An Integrative Meta-Analysis and Cascading Model." *The Journal of Applied Psychology* 95 (1): 54–78. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0017286>.
- Landy, Frank J. 2005. "Some Historical and Scientific Issues Related to Research on Emotional Intelligence." *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 26 (4): 411–24. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.317>.
- Locke, Edwin A. 2005. "Why Emotional Intelligence Is an Invalid Concept." *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 26 (4): 425–31. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.318>.
- Matthews, Gerald, Moshe Zeidner, and Richard D. Roberts. 2002. *Emotional Intelligence: Science and Myth*. Emotional Intelligence: Science and Myth. Cambridge, MA, US: MIT Press.
- Mayer, John. 1999. "Emotional Intelligence: Popular or Scientific Psychology?" *APA Monitor*, September. https://scholars.unh.edu/psych_facpub/414.
- Mayer, John D., and Peter Salovey. 1997. "What Is Emotional Intelligence?" In *Emotional Development and Emotional Intelligence: Educational Implications*, 3–34. New York, NY, US: Basic Books.

- Moon, Sue. 2011. "East Meets West: The Cultural-Relativity of Emotional Intelligence." Thesis. <https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/handle/1807/29817>.
- Murphy, Kevin R. 2006. *A Critique of Emotional Intelligence: What Are the Problems and How Can They Be Fixed?* A Critique of Emotional Intelligence: What Are the Problems and How Can They Be Fixed? Mahwah, NJ, US: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.
- Roberts, R. D., M. Zeidner, and G. Matthews. 2001. "Does Emotional Intelligence Meet Traditional Standards for an Intelligence? Some New Data and Conclusions." *Emotion (Washington, D.C.)* 1 (3): 196–231.
- Sala, F. 2002. "Emotional Competence Inventory (ECI): Technical Manual." http://www.eiconsortium.org/pdf/ECI_2_0_Technical_Manual_v2.pdf.
- Sennett, Richard. 2000. *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism*. 1 edition. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Sternberg, Robert J., and Elena L. Grigorenko. 2000. "Practical Intelligence and Its Development." In *The Handbook of Emotional Intelligence: Theory, Development, Assessment, and Application at Home, School, and in the Workplace*, 215–43. San Francisco, CA, US: Jossey-Bass. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511807947.018>.
- Van Kleef, Gerben A. 2009. "How Emotions Regulate Social Life: The Emotions as Social Information (EASI) Model." *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 18 (3): 184–88. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8721.2009.01633.x>.
- Van Rooy, David L., and Chockalingam Viswesvaran. 2004. "Emotional Intelligence: A Meta-Analytic Investigation of Predictive Validity and Nomological Net." *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 65 (1): 71–95. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0001-8791\(03\)00076-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0001-8791(03)00076-9).
- Van Rooy, David L., Chockalingam Viswesvaran, and Paul Pluta. 2005. "An Evaluation of Construct Validity: What Is This Thing Called Emotional Intelligence?" *Human Performance* 18 (4): 445–62. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327043hup1804_9.
- Wong, Chi-Sum, Kenneth S. Law, and Ping-Man Wong. 2004. "Development and Validation of a Forced Choice Emotional Intelligence Measure for Chinese Respondents in Hong Kong." *Asia Pacific Journal of Management* 21 (4): 535–59. <https://doi.org/10.1023/B:APJM.0000048717.31261.d0>.
- Zeidner, M., G. Matthews, and R. D. Roberts. 2001. "Slow down, You Move Too Fast: Emotional Intelligence Remains an 'Elusive' Intelligence." *Emotion (Washington, D.C.)* 1 (3): 265–75.
- Zeidner, Moshe, Gerald Matthews, and Richard D. Roberts. 2004. "Emotional Intelligence in the Workplace: A Critical Review." *Applied Psychology* 53 (3): 371–99. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1464-0597.2004.00176.x>.