

The Science of Emotional Intelligence: Knowns and Unknowns

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This talk will present an overview of what we have learned so far about Emotional intelligence (EI) with respect to theory, assessment, development, research, and applications. EI has recently emerged as one of the most high profile, though protean, of constructs in modern day psychology (Matthews, Zeidner, & Roberts, 2002). EI may be broadly defined as a set of competencies for identifying, processing, and managing emotion, that support insight into self and others, and more effective coping with the demands of everyday life. EI research has prospered, in part, due to the increasing personal importance of intelligence for people in modern society, with EI commonly claimed to predict important social, educational and occupational criteria above and beyond that predicted by general intellectual ability and personality.

It is commonly claimed that tests for EI are predictive of important social, educational, and occupational criteria, beyond that proportion of variance which general intellectual ability or personality predicts. In fact, it has been suggested that EI may be more important than IQ in predicting outstanding performance in upper strata of leadership. Yet despite the flourishing research programs and broad popular interest, scientific evidence for a clearly identified construct of EI is sparse. The science of EI is in its infancy and many questions remain unanswered. Thus, there are various obstacles to realizing the potential benefits of studying EI, as noted by Matthews, Zeidner, & Roberts (2002), in their recent review of the field.

First, there is no agreed definition or conceptualization of EI. It is unclear whether EI is cognitive or non-cognitive, whether it refers to explicit or implicit knowledge of emotion, and whether it refers to a basic aptitude or to some adaptation to a specific social and cultural milieu (Zeidner, et al., in preparation; Matthews, et al, in preparation).

Second, it is unclear how EI may be best measured. Both objective tests and self-report questionnaires have been developed, but scores on different instruments fail to converge particularly well. These measures also relate differently to other individual difference constructs. Objective tests, notably those developed by Mayer et al. are moderately correlated with both general intelligence and personality dimensions. Self-report scales are very highly confounded with existing personality constructs but are independent of conventional intelligence.

Third, the practical utility of tests for EI is limited by these conceptual and psychometric deficiencies. There are some indications of predictive validity but as yet there is too little validity for the tests to be used with confidence in making real-world decisions, such as clinical diagnosis, high stake testing for academic admissions, hiring a job applicant on the basis of their score on a test of EI, or selecting security force personnel for leadership training on the basis of EI measures. Intervention programs that seek to raise EI typically lack a clear theoretical and methodological basis, and often employ a ragbag of techniques, whose psychological effects are unclear.

*Zeidner, M., Roberts, R., & Matthews, G. (in preparation). *A Primer of Emotional Intelligence*. Cambridge: MIT Press

*Matthews, G., Zeidner, M., & Roberts, R. (in preparation). *The Science of Emotional Intelligence: Knowns and Unknowns*. New York: Oxford University Press.

*Matthews, G., Zeidner, M., & Roberts, R. (2002). *Emotional Intelligence: Science and myth*. Cambridge: MIT Press.