

Running Head: IS EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE ACTUALLY PERSONALITY?

Is Emotional Intelligence Just a Part of Personality?

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Abstract

Personality and emotional intelligence are commonly used in organizational selection systems. Personality can be defined in many ways, but one of the common I-O definitions utilizes the Big 5 dimensions: openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and emotional stability. Emotional intelligence, like personality, has a variety of definitions the simplest of which is the ability to understand and manage emotions. A debate currently exists surrounding the use of personality and emotional intelligence. Several researchers believe that emotional intelligence is merely a part of personality, whereas others believe that it is distinct from personality. Evidence exists for both sides of this debate. It appears that there is truth to both sides. Depending on the definition used, emotional intelligence is non-distinct and in other cases it is distinct from personality.

Is Emotional Intelligence just Personality Renamed?

Over the years, personnel selection has become increasingly complex. As concerns with discrimination, accuracy, and predicting future work performance replace the nepotism techniques of the past, selection specialists are looking for better constructs to predict job performance. One construct that is being used more frequently is personality. Personality has not always been popular in research venues, but within the past decade, it has risen in status and is seen as a good predictor of work performance that leads to very little discrimination of protected classes. Branching off from personality is the idea of emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence can be defined most simply as the ability to understand and manage emotions and is beginning to emerge in the battery of selection devices organizations use today (Barchard & Hakstian, 2004).

There has been quite a bit of contention as to whether or not emotional intelligence is distinct from personality or if it is simply another form of personality, however. This paper will focus on this debate. In the first two sections, personality, specifically the Big 5, and emotional intelligence will be reviewed to provide background information on what each construct entails as well as how each is used in the workplace. These informational sections will be followed by a review of the literature both supporting and refuting the notion that emotional intelligence is a piece of personality, rather than a distinct construct. Finally, the paper will conclude with a summary of the evidence on both sides as well as future research directions.

Personality

Personality has been categorized and included in many different models throughout its existence and thus is not easily defined (Hogan, 2005a). Cattell's 16 personality factor classification, Holland's vocational personality model, and the five factor model are just a few of the models that are currently used. Each of these models, although relies on a different number of dimensions and defines personality in slightly different ways can typically be boiled down to the Big 5 personality dimensions (McCrae & John, 1992). The use of the Big 5 dimensions helps researchers and practitioners alike to talk about personality in broad and systematic ways (McAdams, 1992, McCrae & John, 1992). This is also the model that I-O psychologists have focused on. Given the research and practitioner focus on the Big 5 in workplace settings, the remainder of this paper will focus on this hierarchical model (Ones, Viswesvaran, & Dilchert, 2005).

Defining the Big 5

The Big 5 was initially "discovered" in the early 1960s by Tupes and Christal but remained below the radar and lacked the acceptance of many psychologists until the early 1980s (McCrae & John, 1992). At this time, many researchers were becoming slightly interested in personality and by the early 1990s evidence of discriminant and convergent had been shown (McCrae & John, 1992; Murphy & Dzieweczynski, 2005). The Big 5 consists of five major personality dimensions that appear to remain relatively stable throughout a person's life and operate at least minimally well cross-culturally (Saucier & Goldberg, 2003). The five dimensions included in this model are extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism (emotional stability), and openness to experience (culture). Each of these dimensions also has many sub-facets, for example,

concerns with power, love, work, affect, and intellectance (McAdams, 1992; McCrae & John, 1992).

The two most prevalent dimensions utilized throughout research are conscientiousness and emotional stability. Conscientiousness refers to the willingness to follow rules and the willingness to exert effort. Emotional Stability refers to the capacity to allocate resources to accomplish tasks. These two factors are typically seen as trait-oriented motivation and get at a “will do” component of the person. To provide a contrast, an example of a “can do” component would be general mental ability. (Barrick & Mount, 2005; Hertz & Donovan, 2000).

Although conscientiousness and emotional stability are the most commonly used factors, the remaining three dimensions are also used frequently. Agreeableness is typically associated with those who are good-natured, compliant, and cooperative. Those who are extraverted, as we might expect, are sociable, talkative, and assertive around others. Finally, people who are open to new experiences are typically described as imaginative, sensitive, and open-minded. (Roccas, Sagiv, Schwartz, & Knafo, 2002)

These definitions are agreed upon by many researchers despite the fact that there is some debate as to whether or not the Big 5 includes too many factors or too few factors (Hogan, 2005b; McCrae & John, 1992). Despite this debate on the correct number of factors to include, the current paper will address the traditional five dimensions just described. The following segment will describe some of the research surrounding the Big 5 as it pertains to the workplace.

Big 5 Research

Personality is one area of I-O psychology and individual differences that has been heavily researched. Unfortunately, a plethora of research does not always lead to clear answers about a construct. This is the case with personality. Despite the countless research programs focusing on personality, there does not seem to be a clear set of findings that we can focus on here.

Despite the vast array of literature covering personality traits, there are several consistent findings, which will be discussed. The first, and perhaps most important is the positive relationship that the Big 5 shares with performance in the workplace (Borman, 2004). The Big 5 dimensions are significantly related to work-related behaviors such as absenteeism, success in groups, and leadership effectiveness (Barrick & Mount, 2005). Furthermore, personality is fairly stable over time suggesting that its predictive ability may be quite useful in the workplace (Hogan, 2005a).

One finding of predictive ability that has been fairly consistent deals with conscientiousness and emotional stability (neuroticism). Many researchers have come to the conclusion that of the Big 5 factors, these (conscientiousness and emotional stability) are the best predictors of work performance (Barrick & Mount, 2005). For example, Hertz & Donovan found in their 2000 meta-analysis that these dimensions are good predictors of job performance, task performance, job dedication and interpersonal facilitation.

Just because conscientiousness and emotional stability have been found to be the best overall predictors across a wide variety of jobs does not mean that the other dimensions are useless. This same meta-analysis also found that agreeableness and extraversion are better for measuring training performance than conscientiousness and

emotional stability (Hurtz & Donovan, 2000). This evidence shows that although there are many benefits to conscientiousness and emotional stability in the workplace, there are many benefits to the other personality dimensions as well. The other dimensions are simply better suited to specific settings rather than across all jobs or criteria measures.

Adding further predictive ability to the Big 5 dimensions are compound personality dimensions. Literature suggests that compound personality traits are helpful in the workplace and should be used in addition to the five broad dimensions. For example, customer service orientation is best measured as a combination of agreeableness, emotional stability, and conscientiousness (Ones et al., 2005) rather than just one of the Big 5 dimensions. The importance of this combination is made even more evident by the research showing that customer service orientation predicts overall job performance in customer service positions (Hough & Oswald, 2005).

Clearly the Big 5 is able to predict work place behavior such as performance, absenteeism, and leadership. The next question is whether or not these predictions are valid. In fact, there is a lot of literature surrounding the validity of personality in the workplace. It was validity debates that caused the suppression of personality until the 1990s. The next section, therefore, will focus briefly on the validity of personality.

Validity of the Big 5

Despite the small mean differences among races, the stability of personality over time, and its clear predictive ability, personality has been highly criticized for its low validity coefficients over the years (Barrick & Mount, 2005; Hogan, 2005a). Several meta-analyses have been conducted on the validity of personality in the workplace, but there is little agreement on the actual validity ranges. One author reports a true-score

correlation range from .34 to .43 (Barrick & Mount, 2005). Another author reports validity coefficients ranging from .04 to .14 for a wide variety of jobs (Hurtz & Donovan, 2000). As you can see, there is no overlap in the estimations of these two studies, let alone the handfuls of other studies that report yet again differing validities.

Given the vast differences among validity estimates, the research community is searching for reasons why this is occurring. Hurtz and Donovan (2000) for example suggest that the low validities may be due to a lack of common framework for organizing the predictors used in studies. Hough and Oswald (2005) simply state that validities vary across global, overall criterion measures. Barrick and Mount (2005) suggest that the differences may occur because situation plays a role in personality measures. Finally, Hogan (2005a) suggests some measures are framed from the actor's (individual) perspective whereas others are framed from the observer's (peer or researcher) perspective. Ultimately, each of these reasoning for the differences may play a role in the validity of personality measures. For now, the research community has to accept that for the most part, self and other ratings are valid, reasonably similar measures of personality carry similar validities, and despite the validity issue, personality adds incremental prediction above that offered by biodata and general mental ability (Barrick & Mount, 2005; Hogan, 2005b; McAdams, 1992; Murphy & Dzieweczynski, 2005).

As you can see from the evidence provided here, the Big 5 has flourished over the past decade. The use of personality in the workplace and more specifically in selection systems throughout the world is steadily increasing. Despite the predictive ability of personality, however, the validity of personality has still been criticized by many researchers and practitioners.

The next segment of this paper will take a look at emotional intelligence, another flourishing construct in selection. This section will provide definitions of and the research evidence surrounding emotional intelligence. The final section of this paper will integrate the research on personality and emotional intelligence to determine whether or not emotional intelligence truly adds to a selection system that is already making use of personality as a predictor of work performance.

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence is a fairly new construct that is little more than 15 years old. Much like personality research, there are many different definitions and facets to emotional intelligence. One basic definition states that emotional intelligence is the ability to understand and manage emotions (Barchard & Hakstian, 2004). As stated, this section will look at look at the various definitions of emotional intelligence as well as ways in which emotional intelligence has been researched and used in the workplace.

Defining Emotional Intelligence

Bar-On, Handley, and Fund (2006) state that from all of the existing definitions (Darwin until the present) there are several key components that make up emotional intelligence. They include the ability to: understand and express yourself; understand and relate with others; manage and control emotions; change, adapt, and solve problems of a personal and interpersonal nature; and finally the ability to generate positive mood and to be self-motivated. As you can see from these key components it is no wonder authors disagree on the definition of emotional intelligence. These key components alone could make up numerous definitions before they ever overlapped in meaning.

At the root of emotional intelligence is social intelligence, a concept attributed to Thorndike (Law, Wong, & Song, 2004). Although this may seem like just a fact, it affects and contributes to the understanding of emotional intelligence. For instance, it has been argued that since emotional intelligence has its roots in social intelligence, then emotional intelligence may actually be a form of intelligence. In fact, emotional intelligence meets the main criteria for being labeled intelligence according to Gardner. It refers to an ability of a person and is relatively distinct from cognitive ability, and therefore is referred to as a facet of intelligence by many researchers.

Yet another way to look at emotional intelligence is in terms of an ability model or a mixed model. The ability model, put simply, defines emotional intelligence as a type of intelligence (as discussed above). The mixed model refers to the trait-based or dispositional nature of emotional intelligence. (Van Rooy, Viswesvaran, & Pluta, 2005) Some of the debate of whether or not emotional intelligence is distinct from personality stems from this use of the ability or mixed model definitions and will be discussed in later sections of this paper.

Emotional Intelligence in Research

Emotional intelligence has been used in many different ways throughout research. One study, for example, found that the ability model of emotional intelligence predicts leadership potential, has a clear relationship with occupational performance, and with performance in general (Bar-On et al., 2006). The same study also found that emotional intelligence can be used to reliably recruit, hire, and promote “potentially effective employees”. These findings represent just a few of the uses for emotional intelligence, however.

Another study utilized students in a business communication course to show that awareness of emotional intelligence is significantly related to effectiveness in teams. More specifically, Jordan and Ashkanasy (2006) assigned students to teams and allowed them to work together for ten weeks. Throughout the process teams reported on interactions, processes, and such things as mood, work environment and diversions. The individuals also completed measures of emotional intelligence. The authors found that self-awareness of emotional intelligence was significantly related to the effectiveness of the team process, goal focus, and lastly, team effectiveness. These findings are important because more and more businesses are becoming team-oriented and they show the versatility of emotional intelligence in the workplace.

Lopes, Côté, and Salovey (2006) also used the ability model of emotional intelligence in their review. They report that emotional intelligence is related to prosocial behaviors as well as the quality of interpersonal relationships. Although this may not seem important, in the workplace today where there is competition and the need to constantly bring in new clients, these qualities are important. For example, as a consultant part of your job is to bring in new clients, if you are low in emotional intelligence and therefore not as adept at handling interpersonal relationships, your ability to bring in new clients may suffer. Likewise, helping your co-worker complete a difficult project on-time is a good example of a prosocial behavior that may not have occurred without a high level of emotional intelligence.

Finally, one last example of emotional intelligence in the research and workplace deals with performance and stress. Lyons and Schneider (2005) looked at the influence of emotional intelligence on performance. Using mental arithmetic and speech tasks, the

authors found that two facets of emotional intelligence did indeed predict performance. More specifically, emotional perception and facilitating cognition both predicted performance on the speech task.

As you can see from the research presented here, the use of emotional intelligence is becoming widespread. From its use in predicting performance to interpersonal skills to team effectiveness, emotional intelligence is important in the workplace. There is some debate over whether or not emotional intelligence is actually something distinct from personality or if it is simply another part of personality however. The following section will address this debate presenting evidence from both viewpoints. Because the validity issue cannot be separated from this debate on distinction, the validity of emotional intelligence will also be discussed.

Big 5 and Emotional Intelligence

Many authors state that emotional intelligence is indeed something different from personality and offers new information, whereas other authors state that emotional intelligence really doesn't offer much above and beyond personality. So what do we believe? It depends on several factors: the definition, what emotional intelligence is being compared to, and whether or not it has validity.

As mentioned in the previous section, there are many ways to define emotional intelligence: the ability model and the trait (mixed) model are most common. If the ability model of emotional intelligence is used, at least one facet is distinct from the Big 5 and cognitive measures. This facet is emotional congruence or perception and can be described as the similarity between the perceived affective quality of a stimulus for the person and for others (Barchard & Hakstian, 2004). On a side note, Lyons and Schneider

(2005) found evidence that emotional intelligence predicted performance after controlling or cognitive ability which supports the findings of Barchard and Hakstian suggesting that emotional intelligence indeed at least has incremental validity.

Law et al. (2004) also found similar evidence. They found that when “properly defined”, emotional intelligence is related to, but still different from the Big 5. You may ask, what is the proper definition? As defined in this study, emotional intelligence is the ability to understand one’s and others’ emotions, regulate one’s own emotions, and use one’s emotions. In addition to this information, the study also showed that after controlling for the Big 5 personality dimensions, peer ratings of emotional intelligence significantly predicted job performance ratings. These findings provide evidence for the construct and criterion-related validity of emotional intelligence that cannot be ignored.

As mentioned earlier, however, there are two sides to this debate. Thus far we have seen three studies that provide evidence of the usefulness of emotional intelligence in predictive settings. There is evidence of incremental, predictive, and construct validity. Now various studies finding that emotional intelligence is not really all that distinct from personality will be presented.

De Raad (2005) found that emotional intelligence, as a subset of social intelligence, is actually quite similar to the Big 5 personality dimensions. More specifically, over 400 emotional intelligence items (from various existing scales) were evaluated for their fit with the facets of the Big Five Circumplex. Psychologists familiar with the circumplex completed this task and over half of the items (290 of 437) were described adequately by the Big Five dimensions, the remaining 147 items could not be assigned to the circumplex because they were too ambiguous/complex or they fell outside

the domain of the Big Five personality traits. The author went on to develop a factor system of emotional intelligence that resides within the domain of personality. Respect (agreeableness), social competence (extraversion, agreeableness), emotional control (emotional stability), and sagacity and intelligence (autonomy) were the final factors. This factor model shows that although some researchers believe emotional intelligence to be slightly related or distinct from personality, according to this process, it is merely a part of personality.

De Raad (2005) was not the only researcher to find that the distinctness of emotional intelligence should be highly questioned. Schulte, Ree, and Carretta (2004) also found evidence that emotional intelligence is similar to cognitive ability and personality. Using a simpler approach, Schulte et al. administered the Wonderlic Personnel Test, the NEO-FFI, and a measure of emotional intelligence (MSCEIT) to a group of graduate students who were employed full-time. A simple correlation matrix showed that the relationship between *g* and emotional intelligence was .454, and ranged from -.282 to .270 with the various dimensions of the Big 5. After running multiple regressions, they also found that after correcting for measurement error, emotional intelligence can be largely predicted by cognitive ability, agreeableness (Big 5 dimension), and sex with a multiple *R* of .806. This suggests that in a selection system already gathering data on *g*, agreeableness, and sex, emotional intelligence will not add much to the prediction of performance. The authors do suggest looking at the incremental validity of emotional intelligence to see if it may still be a useful construct, however. As we have already seen with Lyons and Schneider (2005) and Law et al. (2004), emotional intelligence does appear to have incremental validity above personality

and cognitive ability. Although cognitive ability is not central to this paper, many selection systems use it in conjunction with personality. Therefore, cognitive ability cannot be completely ignored during this discussion as shown above.

Van der Zee and Wabeke (2004) found further support of the incremental validity of emotional intelligence, but also its strong relation to personality dimensions. Using a trait-based (mixed model) definition of emotional intelligence, the authors found striking results. Based on a factor analysis, they found that the empathy (interpersonal and intrapersonal dimensions) factor of emotional intelligence was highly related to extraversion and agreeableness. Additionally, sense of accomplishment, another facet of emotional intelligence, was related to emotional stability (Big 5). Two more facets, reality-testing and problem-solving, were found to be related to conscientiousness. Lastly, assertiveness was related to autonomy (often part of the Big 5). These findings show even more support for the debate that emotional intelligence is actually a part of the Big 5.

Finally, summarizing the findings presented in this section nicely is the work of Van Rooy et al. (2005). These authors looked at both the ability and trait (mixed) model of emotional intelligence in relation to personality and cognitive ability measures. Using meta-analytic techniques, they found that using the ability based model of emotional intelligence the correlations with the Big 5 dimensions did not exceed .20. With the trait-based model, the correlations exceeded .30 for all factors except agreeableness (.27), and actually reached .40 for emotional stability. These statistics seem striking, but it is important to take into account credibility intervals, in which case the findings are still evident, but not nearly as strong. An interesting side note, cognitive ability has more in

common with ability models ($r=.34$) than trait-based models ($r=.13$). Again, in congruence with the past research, ability-based models appear to fair better when looking for a construct distinct from personality, whereas trait-based models appear to overlap highly with the Big 5 dimensions.

Conclusions

This paper has focused on the relationship between personality and emotional intelligence. Several similarities between the constructs were noted including the many definitions that each construct has, as well as the number of ways to measure each. These are not the only similarities however. Both constructs are also used in the workplace to predict job performance. Given the somewhat similar material encompassed in these constructs as well as their similar uses in the workplace, it is reasonable to expect the constructs to overlap to some degree.

Indeed, the constructs do overlap. The question is how much do they actually overlap and which model of emotional intelligence should we use in predicting performance. The evidence indicates that the ability model overlaps less with personality than the trait-based model of emotional intelligence, suggesting its use in prediction models. But, there is also evidence stating that the ability model overlaps with cognitive ability, suggesting the use of the trait-based model of emotional intelligence.

If our question is altered slightly, and instead asks whether or not emotional intelligence should be used at all as a predictor, we need to consider the measures already present in the selection system. For example, if the selection system contains a cognitive ability test and personality measure, as many systems do, then perhaps neither model of emotional intelligence is ideal from the correlational standpoint. More specifically, the

constructs are highly related to emotional intelligence. When looking at the regression information, however, it becomes clear that despite the potential overlap in constructs, emotional intelligence provides incremental validity. That is, emotional intelligence predicts job performance after controlling for cognitive ability and personality.

The debate over whether or not emotional intelligence is distinct from personality will continue, just as the debate over what definition of personality and emotional intelligence is best. The ultimate answer may lie in the situation in which the constructs are being used. Therefore, future research should focus on testing the use of different measures and definitions of emotional intelligence in different settings. For example, is there any difference in the measures/definitions that work best when you are in a career center trying to help a person identify their strengths and weaknesses, compared to an applicant setting when trying to identify the best potential candidate, compared to a training setting where you will provide techniques for improving emotional intelligence? These are just a few of the many workplace settings that could potentially benefit from emotional intelligence.

Along this line of research, a decision needs to be made as to whether or not we need different definitions and measures of emotional intelligence, or if the field can decide on one version. Given the previous research suggestion, whittling the many variations of emotional intelligence down to one all-encompassing and succinct definition may not only be futile but ill-advised as well. If research shows that the situation and ultimate use of the information should dictate the measure and definition used, then quite obviously it would be unwise to come up with one sole definition of emotional intelligence.

Finally, it would be wise to look at whether or not emotional intelligence by itself is a better predictor of job performance than personality or even cognitive ability and if this differs based on the model being used. Past research already shows that cognitive ability is highly related to the ability model, whereas personality is related to the trait model. It would be interesting to determine if utilizing both emotional intelligence models results in better, the same or poorer prediction of performance than using a cognitive ability and personality measure.

In conclusion, although there is a debate as to whether or not emotional intelligence is distinct from personality, there is clear evidence that it is useful in predicting job performance. It offers incremental validity over cognitive ability and personality, and helps us to further understand how to accurately predict job performance.

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