The secret ingredient. How EI seasons our working lives.
Korn Ferry Hay Group’s partnership with Richard Boyatzis and Dan Goleman provides a validated measure of emotional and social intelligence competencies and an extensive source of behavioral data. The Emotional and Social Competency Inventory (ESCI) also benefits from ongoing studies that explore emotional intelligence (EI) and its relationship to performance at work and other key outcomes.

What’s inside?
This series of updates shares recent research and its implications for developing EI through training, coaching and education. This report explores relationships between EI competencies and job performance, job satisfaction, career and life satisfaction, employee engagement and career success.

“Emotional intelligence is important to job performance, physical and mental health, leadership and job satisfaction... We find convincing evidence that EI is ‘the sine qua non of leadership’ (p. 45, Walter et al., 2001).”

Miao, Humphrey & Qian, 2014.

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Introduction

The first update in this series, ‘From soft skills to EI’, offers a theoretical framework for how we manifest our emotional and social intelligence at different levels of our personality.

The theory has practical value – it helps us to be clear about why we are interested in people’s EI, which interventions we want to offer them and which instruments fit these purposes.

This update shares recent research findings that remind us why EI is so important for the people we work with – employees and students – and their organizations. Together these studies explore the impact of EI on job performance, job satisfaction, career and life satisfaction, employee engagement and career success. They help us promote the business case for its assessment and development. And they reveal specific insights that inform our practice.

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Together these recent studies investigate how EI improves individuals’ effectiveness and impacts their organizations. They include:

1. An examination of the relationships between general intelligence (g), emotional and social intelligence competencies and cognitive intelligence competencies. Over 600 part-time and full-time MBA students from 23 countries took part in this study (Boyatzis, Batista-Foguet, Fernandez-i-Marin & Truninger, 2015).

2. A meta-analysis investigating the relationship between ‘mixed EI’ and job performance. Mixed EI instruments typically measure a number of well-established psychological constructs, which themselves relate to performance. The research took into account over 50 primary studies and meta-analyses to examine the criterion validity of mixed EI (Joseph, Jin, Newman & O’Boyle, 2015).

3. An examination of the longer term impact of a range of capabilities on career and life satisfaction and career success, 5 to 19 years after MBA graduation. With a final sample of 266 graduates, the researchers explored the influence of emotional, social and cognitive intelligence competencies along with general intelligence and demographic variables (Amdurer, Boyatzis, Saatcioglu, Smith & Taylor, 2014).

4. The first meta-analysis to examine the relationship between EI and job satisfaction, based on 132 studies, 138 samples and a sample size of over 27,000. The research explored each ‘stream’ of EI: stream 1 ability measures based on the Mayer-Salovey model, stream 2 peer and self-report measures based on the same model and stream 3 self and peer-reports based on mixed models of EI (Miao, Humphrey & Qian, 2014).

5. An exploration of the impact of employees’ behavioral emotional intelligence, perception of shared personal vision, shared positive mood and perceived organizational support on their level of organizational engagement. The research analyzed survey data from 231 team members from two organizations and measured EI competencies reported by peers (Mahon, Taylor & Boyatzis, 2014).
What do we learn from this work?

EI and intelligence.

Which is the best predictor of life and work outcomes: EI or IQ? To explore this question, Boyatzis et al. (2015) studied the relationships between general intelligence, measured through the Graduate Management Admission Test, and emotional, social and cognitive intelligence competencies, measured by the ESCI-U\(^1\), the education version of the ESCI, and its former versions (ECI\(^2\) and EAQ\(^3\)). These competencies divide into:

- **Social intelligence (SI):** Empathy, Organizational awareness, Influence, Inspirational leadership, Conflict management, Coach and mentor, Teamwork.
- **Two cognitive competencies:** Systems thinking and Pattern recognition, included the ESCI-U.

Their work revealed an important finding for educators and employers of those entering the workforce. As expected, general intelligence (g) related more strongly with cognitive competencies than with EI. So for students and employees in the early stages of their careers, who need to demonstrate how smart they are, the development of these cognitive competencies alongside their emotional and social intelligence is important.

This study also exposed the extent to which EI is in the eye of the beholder. The way that others perceive our emotional intelligence is influenced by their context and the expectations and attributions they employ as a result:

- **Personal sources – friends and family – observe no relationship between EI and g.** We are free to be smart, or emotionally and socially adept, or both, without expectation or attribution either way.
- **Professional sources, on the other hand, observe a positive relationship between EI and g for men; the higher your intelligence score, the more likely your manager or co-workers will attribute emotional intelligence to you. However, if you are a woman the same observers are likely to observe a slight negative relationship; the brighter you are, the more likely you are to be perceived as slightly lower in EI.**
- **And our own view?** Self-assessment data showed a slight negative relationship between EI and g. The smarter we are, the less likely we are to believe ourselves blessed with emotional intelligence.

These findings support the idea that students and employees need a mix of EI, cognitive competencies and intelligence. They also spotlight the potential impact of stereotyping and social comparison with a clarity that we can’t ignore when coaching individuals or encouraging students to make use of their EI.

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2. Emotional Competence Inventory.
3. External Assessment Questionnaire.
EI as a predictor of job performance and career success.

Can EI instruments be used to predict performance outcomes? Mixed EI, currently referred to as stream 3, includes two approaches to this question. Two studies support their value:

1. Trait EI, measured with self-report instruments, typically includes a mix of conscientiousness, emotional stability, extraversion, self-efficacy, self-rated performance, ability EI and cognitive ability (Joseph et al., 2015). These researchers’ meta-analysis showed that trait EI instruments predict supervisors’ ratings of job performance almost as well as a battery of traditional psychometrics, combined to measure these same constructs. Therefore, for practitioners wanting to predict job performance to inform recruitment decisions (for which multi-rater data cannot usually be gathered) EI self-report assessments provide practical alternatives.

2. Behavioral EI has developed from research designed to identify what average and outstanding performers do differently. It is typically measured using 360-degree or multi-rater instruments, which collate and report the perspectives of the key people that an individual works with and impacts every day. Organizations using them for employee and leadership development can have confidence that the competency feedback they gather is closely related to an individual’s job performance.

Behavioral EI has developed from research designed to identify what average and outstanding performers do differently.
The study with MBA students (Amdurer et al., 2014) provided an intriguing glimpse into the relationship between emotional and social intelligence competencies – and some specific behaviors within them – and their long term impact:

- EI competencies, as a whole, showed a positive impact on career success.
- While Teamwork is often a focus for student development, management programs can prime their students for career success and career and life satisfaction by also helping them to develop their Adaptability.
- Influence and Achievement orientation, while believed to be important behaviors in today’s complex organizations, related negatively to career success. Students and new recruits should be encouraged to manage their impact by increasing their awareness of how they use these competencies: where, when, with whom and how often.

**EI as a predictor of job, career and life satisfaction.**

Job attitudes, and especially job satisfaction, have been extensively studied in organizational research. Yet one of these studies provides the very first meta-analysis of the relationship between EI and job satisfaction (Miao et al., 2014). The researchers set out to explore the relative impact of different ways of measuring EI, over and above cognitive ability and the five factor model of personality. Their findings encourage the use of EI assessment, training and development for both employees and leaders:

- When it comes to explaining differences in employees’ job satisfaction, their cognitive ability and personality in combination account for only 15% of the variance. Trait EI impressively accounts for nearly half of the variance. Ability EI, being a measure of emotional cognitive ability, is a weak predictor of job satisfaction.
- Leaders’ levels of EI are almost as important as employees’ EI in predicting employee job satisfaction, so both are worth assessing and developing. And leader EI demonstrates an impressive relationship to group satisfaction; emotionally intelligent leaders create a positive tone for their teams.

The study of emotional, social and cognitive intelligence competencies, and their impact 5 to 19 years after MBA graduation, complements this work (Amdurer et al., 2014). Multi-rater behavioral feedback, now routine in the workplace, revealed the following:

- Emotional intelligence as a whole predicted career satisfaction. Adaptability, in particular, showed a strong relationship. However, MBA students strong in Influence showed less satisfied in their subsequent careers.
- Demonstrating emotional intelligence or social intelligence generally at the time of graduation did not predict life satisfaction. However, greater Adaptability and Teamwork did. By contrast, those students with greater Achievement orientation, or who were stronger in Influence, went on to feel less life satisfaction.

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**EI as a predictor of engagement.**

The researchers in this study were curious to understand how emotional intelligence competencies, as reported by peers, might drive a person’s commitment to their organization (Mahon et al., 2014).

Their research revealed the following relationships between employees’ level of engagement and a number of factors:

- **Shared personal vision** – the positive emotions employees feel about the organization’s view of the future and management’s commitment to reach a clearly defined vision or purpose – related significantly and positively with engagement. Increasing levels of EI amplified the relationship between them. Compared with individuals with low EI, those with high EI and low shared vision are less engaged; those with high EI and high shared vision are more engaged.

- **Shared positive mood** – how employees feel about the organization and their work within it – showed the strongest positive relationship with engagement. However, EI showed no amplifying effect.

- **Perceived organizational support** – employees’ belief that their organization values their contributions and cares about their wellbeing – related significantly and positively with engagement. Increasing levels of EI amplified the relationship between them. Compared with individuals with low EI, those with high EI and low perceived organizational support are less engaged; those with high EI and high perceived organizational support are more engaged.

They concluded that EI alone is insufficient to increase engagement. However, EI’s self-awareness and self-management work with the psychological climate factors – shared personal vision and perceived organizational support – to activate an employee’s ability to commit themselves to their organization.

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**EI amplifies the relationships between shared vision, perceived organizational support and employee engagement.**
What does this mean for EI practitioners?

The relationships between emotional, social and cognitive competencies, intelligence, satisfaction, engagement and performance are as intricate as one would expect.

The complexity of this work serves to remind us that, in adult development, the individual’s agenda is key. If we are coaching for ‘quick win’ performance, and our coachee, employee or student has their sights set on life and career satisfaction in the longer term, we are at cross purposes.

Reassuringly the findings do offer general insights that can be woven into development discussions:

- What do we need to know about a person, their context and their aspirations? How can we help them balance the demands of performance with their need for long term career and life satisfaction? How might this understanding influence the questions we ask during coaching conversations?

- What do we know about the person and their work relationships? What does their EI feedback reveal about the range of perceptions and expectations others have of them? How can we help individuals to test and validate their EI feedback, in the light of the different activities they perform, the different behaviors they demonstrate and the different people they impact?

How can we help individuals to test and validate their EI feedback, in the light of the different activities they perform, the different behaviors they demonstrate and the different people they impact?
- Is **Adaptability** a core capability for work and life? Is its importance increasing as change accelerates in the workplace? How can individuals develop their **Adaptability** to include all its facets: the ability to attend to the things that matter; to choose to go along with, or adapt to, or challenge their context; to respond to the changing needs, preferences, interests and barriers that others present to them?

- Does **Achievement orientation** have its time and place? Is it a key component of a successful transition from entry level to middle management? Does it get in the way of transitions to senior leadership? Does it fuel dissatisfaction in the longer term? How can individuals manage their **Achievement orientation** over time, to balance its impact on their satisfaction and the experience and effectiveness of those they lead?

- Is the dissatisfaction that can result from using more **Influence** the price that must be paid for the increased performance it can generate? Can different manifestations of **Influence**, or other competencies like **Teamwork**, offer alternatives? How can we support individuals to choose social intelligence competencies that work for them in the short and the long term?

- Can organizations mitigate the reported ongoing decline in employee engagement by developing their employees’ **EI**? What help do they need from practitioners? And how can we help organizations to deliver vision and support, authentically, so that EI’s amplifying effect can secure greater engagement?

It is no surprise that Miao et al. (2014) described EI as the “sine qua non” of leadership, the indispensable condition of effective behavior at work. Together they show that emotionally intelligent employees are more likely to be high-performing, satisfied with their jobs, able to have a positive impact on the satisfaction and performance of others and primed to be more engaged. Organizations need to know who their high EI employees are, and use appropriate EI assessments to develop more of them.

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The third report in the series, ‘10 more years boosting performance’, provides a summary of studies carried out by researchers from a number of different countries which reveal how EI impacts workplace outcomes in different contexts and roles.

The 360-degree Emotional and Social Competency Inventory is available through Korn Ferry Hay Group. If you would like to find out more about the tool and its applications, please visit www.kornferry.com/haygroup

References


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