

Foreword

The field of emotional intelligence (EI) has moved forward in dramatic ways since Jack Mayer and I published our first article on EI in 1990. In just a brief decade and a half, our state of knowledge has matured to the extent that an international handbook is now possible. And if we look back further, to the seminal and influential articles on social intelligence (even the ones doubting its existence), practical intelligence, and intrapersonal intelligence, we have clearly come further still. But now is not the time for complacency in EI research. Although we may have traveled a good ways down the road from those earlier days, it is only in recent years that there is an emerging consensus in the EI literature on definitions, best methods of measurement, and expectations for what EI should predict.

Perhaps what is most helpful about this handbook is that it very quickly does what many books and articles do not do: It clearly differentiates the genuinely scientific approach to EI from popularizations. In doing so, the chapters herein hold EI to the highest standard. Not only must EI have heuristic value, but it cannot be merely old wine in new bottles or an interesting idea impossible to operationalize. We have argued for some time that the most useful approach to EI is one that considers it a set of interrelated skills. In that sense, we define emotional intelligence as involving both the capacity to reason about emotions and to use emotions in order to assist reasoning. We believe EI includes abilities to identify emotions accurately in oneself and in other people, understand emotions and emotional language, manage emotions in oneself and in other people, and use emotions to facilitate cognitive activities and motivate adaptive behavior. These skills are ones that can be measured and that are not easily incorporated into definitions (and measures) of existing constructs such as social competence or personality.

The chapters in this handbook also place ideas about EI into the context of general theories and research pertaining to intelligence, emotion, and personality. This is more important than it might sound at first. One of the difficulties with popular ideas about EI is that characteristics of humans that are adaptive and desirable but have little to do with intelligence or emotion are sometimes classified as EI. These have included task persistence, zeal, optimism, good character, morality, and the like. It is important to consider what EI is but also what it is not. The most useful measures of EI should show only modest correlations with general intelligence and should be largely unassociated with standard measures of personality such as those mapping on to the “Big Five”.

Couching EI—especially as measured—within conventional ideas about intelligence more generally, such as its overlap with social intelligence and

whether EI is best thought of as fluid, crystallized, or both, is also characteristic of many of the chapters in this handbook, and these perspectives are quite helpful. In other writing, we have tried to argue that EI meets the traditional standards—more or less—for what it means for some construct to be an intelligence. At first we asked this question in order to be provocative. But over time, it has turned into a more serious line of inquiry that is very much assisted by the kind of discussion that can be found here. As one of the author teams suggests, the interpretation of research results is greatly benefited by definitional and theoretical coherence in this area. Relating EI to other similar-sounding kinds of intelligence also motivates greater clarity in describing what is unique to EI.

A part of this handbook is devoted to issues of measurement. And these are welcome discussions. Although we have preferred ability-based measures to self-report inventories, there is no gold-standard yet in this field, and all measurement approaches pose serious challenges. Self-report measures may be prone to self-aggrandizement and other reporting biases and may have little discriminant validity with respect to typical personality measures. Ability measures present the dilemma of how we define a “correct” or, at least, a better or more adaptive answer? Reference to consensual norms or the responses of experts are two approaches, but they also represent interesting conceptual questions: What if the masses tend to be misguided in this area? Who, exactly, should be considered an expert? Measurement issues are not going to be easily resolved, but like the editors of this volume, I agree that future approaches need to emphasize the assessment of emotion-related abilities in ongoing, fluid situations and not just draw upon crystallized emotional knowledge.

Perhaps some of the most exciting work—but also where clever ideas far outstrip available data—is in the application of EI to education, work, psychopathology, and physical health. Appropriate speculation about the potential utility of EI, as both theory and as a set of measurable constructs, is featured in the final set of chapters here. The possibilities seem limitless, and the imaginative uses of EI already observed in the field are encouraging.

One area still needing considerably more attention—and the lack of research in this area is especially obvious in an international handbook—concerns culture. Is EI a culture-bound construct? Certainly display rules for emotional expression are culturally specific (just compare how people behave at funerals in different parts of the world). But are the underlying skills involved in identifying, understanding, managing, and using emotion also different across cultures? We think, in general, that they are not, but we really do not know for sure. And how might knowledge of cultural differences (e.g., in which cultures is giving honest feedback to your boss about his terrible idea an adaptive behavior and in which is it maladaptive?) be incorporated in theories and measures of EI? These are questions still needing to be addressed.

Reading these chapters is very satisfying and not just because so many of the contributors are friends whose thoughts about emotional intelligence I have always respected. These are thoughtful commentaries that steer the field in the right direction. They guide us clearly with respect to what we need to

do next. And they make it salient that globalization has contributed to great scientific strides forward in understanding EI.

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