

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE VERSUS EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE

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Abstract

For the past 25 years, emotional intelligence has been one of the most analyzed concepts in social sciences. The approach is on the border between the academic research and the business-organizational area. The concept first appeared almost three decades ago and made the headline in tenths of thousands of books and articles. Nevertheless, in this myriad of publications, we can depict three main approaches and models: emotional traits, emotional abilities and emotional competence. Although the majority of studies promote the advantages of emotional intelligence, something is missing from the puzzle, and that is the concept of emotional competence. The relation between these two concepts is a symbiotic one. Emotional intelligence is a prerequisite that forms the building bricks for developing emotional competence which, in turn, leads to performance. And in order to achieve the results that many training programs claim to bring (improved academic and job performance, personal development) emotional intelligence is a must yet not enough on its own. For long lasting results, emotional competence must be developed, based on improved emotional intelligence.

Keywords: emotional intelligence, emotional competence, personal development, models, theories

Emotional intelligence is one of the most studied topics in psychological literature, because it is an umbrella concept both in the business-organizational environment and in the academic one. Ever since it's first

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mentioning in 1985, it stirred a great interest among researchers and managers, a fact that can be seen in the huge number of studies and books that increased exponentially by the year. Over the last three decades, emotional intelligence has become one of the most visible constructs in the research on individual differences (Zeidner, Roberts, & Matthews, 2008). A simple search on Amazon Books, the largest online books selling website, yields close to 15.000 results when using „emotional intelligence” as keywords. Using the same keywords in psychological data bases such as Sage Journals, APA Psych Info, Science Direct, Ebsco Host and Springer Link, results show close to 70.000 articles on this topic, with an exponential increase in the last decade. Social sciences (Ashkanasy & Jordan, 1997; Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Weisinger, 1998), business-organizational area (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002) and educational-academic as well (Barchard, 2003; Vandervoort, 2006) have all shown great interest in this field of research and practice. In a general acceptance, emotional intelligence represents a set of skills that support the identification, processing and management of emotions.

If we attempt a clarification of the concept and the studies in the area, we are left with three main approaches (Seal & Andrews-Brown, 2010). The first one is the model of emotional quotient (Bar-On, 1997), centered on the general wellbeing and measured with the Emotional Quotient Inventory - EQi (Bar-On, 2006). This is also referred to as a mixed model, where emotional intelligence is regarded as a mix of skills such as emotional awareness, traits such as persistence and desirable behaviors. This model shifts the accent from general intelligence and cognitive abilities (Cobb & Mayer, 2000) towards the emotional intelligence. The second perspective is the model of emotional abilities (Salovey, Mayer, & Caruso, 2004), measured with the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test - MSCEIT (Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 2000). In this approach, emotional intelligence is regarded as a set of skills that is supposed to contribute to the evaluation and expression of emotions, to an effective emotion regulation, as well as to the use of emotions to motivate, plan and succeed in life. This model includes: (1) the ability to perceive and evaluate one's and others' emotions; (2) the ability to generate feelings and emotions in order to facilitate cognitive activities; (3) the ability to understand the information driven by affects; (4) and the ability to make a good emotion (self) management, in order to promote emotional and intellectual growth and socially adaptive relations (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2002). The third and

last main approach is the model of emotional competence (Goleman, 1995), focused on those behaviors that lead to performance, and measured with the Emotional Competence Inventory - ECI (Boyatzis, Goleman, & Rhee, 2000). In this model, emotional intelligence is seen as a large array of dispositions and competences that vary from individual traits to learned abilities. All these are included in five separate elements, totaling 25 different competences from the following categories: (1) self-awareness; (2) motivation; (3) self-regulation; (4) empathy and (5) adaptability in relationships (Goleman, 1998). Goleman claims that these competences are essential for learning job related skills, that later direct the emotional intelligence towards achieving performance. The model developed by Mayer and Salovey was mainly used in educational programs, while the model proposed by Goleman found its use in the organizational environment (Oberst, Gallifa, Farriols, & Villaregut, 2009).

Corroborating these three perspectives, Seal and Andrews-Brown (2010) suggested an integrative model that can offer a better understanding of the concept and the role of emotional intelligence and its part in the development of emotional competences. The two authors suggested as a possible solution to this paradigmatic debate to view this concept as a holistic one. This way, the innate capacities (emotional abilities) can moderate the relation between the preferred patterns (emotional traits) and the learned active behaviors (emotional competences), in order to identify and regulate oneself and others' emotions and successfully adapt to the environment.

Of particular interest in this debate is the concept of general competence, which is understood and defined in several ways: "*the description of learning outcomes, meaning what can a person know or prove to have learned as a result of a learning process*" (Oberst et al., 2009, p. 253), a general term that refers to the quality of general performance of a person in a specific task (Black & Ornelles, 2001) or the ability to adopt the behaviors built around a construct called intention, that lead to performance (Emmerling & Boyatzis, 2002). As far as the old polemics between intelligence and competences is concerned, the latter refers to the set of abilities involved in solving personal and professional problems, while intelligence involves the subcomponents of these abilities, in the form of thinking and understanding (Sternberg et al., 2000).

In order to clarify any confusion that might appear between the two concepts of emotional intelligence and emotional competence, Goleman (1998)

suggested and proved that the emotional competences, although deeply rooted in the emotional intelligence, are a higher ability that leads to performance. In other words, people have the potential of emotional intelligence, but also need to develop their emotional competences. Emotional intelligence is placed at the base of emotional competences which, in turn, are antecedents of performance, so that the simple presence of a high emotional intelligence is simply not enough. This means that people with high emotional intelligence have the capacity to learn and develop certain competences, not that those competences have been developed. As an analogy, Goleman suggested the case of musical education, where some persons are born with an incredible voice, but unless trained and educated, they will hardly ever become complete singers. Confirming these studies, Abraham (2004) claimed that emotional intelligence is indeed a predictor of performance when it acts through emotional competences. This can explain why many studies made in organizations and institutions found little or no contribution of emotional intelligence upon general performance (Murensky, 2000; Wolff, Pescosolido, & Druskat, 2002; Wong & Law, 2002). Following the same line, Wang, Young, Wilhite and Marczyk (2011) differentiate emotional intelligence from emotional competence, stating that the first one is somewhat innate, while the second one can be learned and developed, thus confirming once again previous studies (Goleman, 1998).

Wakeman (2006) suggests that emotional competences cannot exist without the factors of emotional intelligence, which support the development of these competences. Thus, a person that is capable of properly regulating his/her own emotions has the possibility of developing emotional competence through self-discipline. Similarly, a person that can correctly identify his/her own emotions has the possibility of developing an emotional competence in empathy or conflict management. In both cases, it is clear that the factors of emotional intelligence offer the foundations for developing emotional competence. Wakeman (2006) claims that the level of a person's emotional intelligence can be evaluated in a certain degree by assessing the emotional competences developed in that person, which is quite an interesting approach to this matter. In this view, emotional competences are regarded as a result of several factors, including emotional intelligence.

Building on the same idea, Oberst et al. (2009) defines the two concepts considering emotional competences as individual differences in the

management of emotions and emotionally charged problems (Ciarrochi & Scott, 2006), while emotional intelligence as the ability to properly perceive emotions and to use them to guide thinking and to understand and control emotions (Mayer & Salovey, 1997).

Stating that emotional intelligence and emotional competence are closely linked would be somewhat obvious. Nevertheless, these two concepts are intimately intertwined both at a theoretical and practical level (Goleman, 1998; Seal & Andrews-Brown, 2010; Wang et al., 2011). It is possible that this close connection was the source of the misuse and difficulty in defining the concepts, going as far as considering them identical (Nelis et al., 2011). Yet far from being identical, between these two concepts lies a very clear conceptual line. Emotional intelligence is a set of innate factors (Goleman, 1998), while emotional competences can be developed (Spencer, 2001; Boyatzis et al., 2002). Whilst useful and necessary, prerequisites such as emotional intelligence are not enough, thus explaining why developing this field can sometimes lead to small or no changes at all over general performance (Murensky, 2000; Wolff, Pescosolido, & Druskat, 2002; Wong & Law, 2002). Also, this can explain why emotional intelligence becomes a good predictor only when it acts through the emotional competences (Abraham, 2004).

Ever since it first appeared, the concept of emotional intelligence caused a great interest in the scientific and business world, with applications in both areas. Furthermore, the concept of emotional intelligence was found to be an important predictor of general performance when it acted by means of emotional competence (Abraham, 2004). Unless mediated by emotional competence, the concept of emotional intelligence has little influence over general performance (Murensky, 2000; Wolff, Pescosolido, & Druskat, 2002; Wong & Law, 2002).

This study focuses on the differences and similarities between two important concepts in the area of personal and professional development: emotional intelligence and emotional competence. It shows that, although emotional intelligence is very important, it represents only half of what is needed for achieving performance. The other half means developing emotional competences, because they will last on the long run. On a practical level, this shows that all the programs that target the development of emotional intelligence should not stop at this point but instead go further and seek to

develop emotional competences. They should build on emotional intelligence prerequisites and thus lay the foundations for emotional competence.

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