



Brief Report

Constructs of social and emotional effectiveness: Different labels, same content?

Katja Schlegel*, Didier Grandjean, Klaus R. Scherer

Swiss Center for Affective Sciences, University of Geneva, rue des Batoirs 7, CH-1205 Geneva, Switzerland

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ABSTRACT

Social skills, interpersonal competence, political skill, emotional intelligence, empathy, and emotion recognition ability all belong to the domain of social and emotional effectiveness constructs (SEECs). To date, it remains unclear to what extent SEECs overlap and differ and how they fit in the nomological net of personality. We examined the overall dimensional structure of 32 scales from five self-report and three performance-based instruments, representing the above-mentioned constructs. Four components, namely Expressivity, Sensitivity, Emotional Abilities, and Self-Control, were identified and correlated meaningfully with the Big Five. Trait emotional intelligence and other self-reported SEECs overlapped largely rather than measuring separate constructs. This study provides the basis for a taxonomy of SEECs that will help integrating previous and future research in this domain.

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1. Introduction

Understanding other people and social situations as well as acting according to this understanding is at the core of many constructs that have been related to success in personal and professional life, such as social skills, social or interpersonal competence, interpersonal communication skill, social intelligence, and more recently, political skill and emotional intelligence (Ferris, Perrewé, & Douglas, 2002). Further, terms like assertiveness, empathy, interpersonal sensitivity, self-monitoring, emotion regulation, sociability, and many more have been used to describe more specific aspects of such constructs, which we will refer to as social and emotional effectiveness constructs (SEECs).

Although there is a considerable body of research on each of these constructs, SEECs have been rarely studied comparatively (Ferris et al., 2002). As a consequence, the structure and nomological net of this domain have received little theoretical and empirical attention. More specifically, it is unclear how SEECs overlap and differ and which broader underlying competencies they cover. For example, it seems plausible that two constructs with similar labels like social skill (see Riggio & Riggio, 2001) and interpersonal competence (Buhrmester, Furman, Wittenberg, & Reis, 1988) measure a similar characteristic, although both have been developed independently. As a notable exception to the lack of empirical research on the SEEC domain, Heggstad and Morrison (2008) have studied the factor structure of several SEEC measures and found five underlying dimensions, namely Social Potency, Social Appro-

priateness, Social Emotion Expression, Social Reputation, and Emotional Intelligence. However, to date no taxonomy or organization scheme as how to classify SEECs exists (Ferris et al., 2002). One reason is that some SEECs themselves are defined and used inconsistently.

Emotional intelligence is a construct with a particularly controversial debate about its conceptualization. In one research stream, emotional intelligence is defined as a set of four cognitive abilities, namely emotion perception, emotion facilitation, understanding emotions, and emotion management (“ability emotional intelligence”; Mayer, Salovey, Caruso, & Sitarenios, 2003). In the second research stream that includes many different models emotional intelligence is defined as a set of non-cognitive traits, competencies, and motivational variables that are linked to interpersonal success (“trait emotional intelligence”). For example, the trait emotional intelligence model by Petrides and Furnham (2003) includes 15 facets such as Emotion Regulation, Stress Management, Self-Motivation, Empathy, and Optimism. Some researchers criticized trait emotional intelligence models as a “grab bag” of loosely connected attributes that are not new (e.g., Joseph & Newman, 2010). Indeed, for example the facets of the Petrides and Furnham (2003) model resemble long established SEECs, although a formal comparison is missing. Cherniss (2010) therefore proposed to consider trait emotional intelligence models as SEECs and to save the label emotional intelligence exclusively for the ability-based model. However, his distinction between SEECs and ability emotional intelligence is somewhat ambiguous. For example, the ability to recognize emotions in others from the face, voice, and body (emotion recognition ability) is considered a SEEC with a long research tradition (Cherniss, 2010), but also a basic dimension in ability emotional intelligence. Further, emotion recognition ability occurs

* Corresponding author. Fax: +41 223799844.

E-mail addresses: Katja.Schlegel@unige.ch (K. Schlegel), Didier.Grandjean@unige.ch (D. Grandjean), Klaus.Scherer@unige.ch (K.R. Scherer).

in several trait emotional intelligence models. This ability might thus well be a common dimension underlying many SEECs and emotional intelligence.

To summarize, to date it is unclear what the relationship (a) among established SEECs themselves and (b) of emotional intelligence models and their components with established SEECs is and what common dimensions SEECs and emotional intelligence share. In this study, we will investigate the nomological network of SEECs and emotional intelligence. By doing so, we will contribute to the overdue integration of the largely independent research fields within the SEEC domain. More specifically, we will focus on three questions:

First, which are the broader dimensions underlying the SEEC domain? To answer this question, we administered a range of widely used questionnaires and tests to broadly cover the domain. In particular, we included questionnaires of social skills comprising social and emotional sensitivity, expressivity, and control scales (Riggio & Carney, 2003); interpersonal competence which includes the ability to handle interpersonal tasks such as initiating relationships, personal disclosure, and empathic concern (Buhrmester et al., 1988); political skill which refers to abilities that are particularly relevant in organizational contexts, such as networking ability and the ability to influence others (Ferris et al., 2005); interpersonal reactivity or empathy (Davis, 1983), and trait emotional intelligence (Petrides & Furnham, 2003). In addition, we used two performance-based assessments of emotion recognition ability and an emotional intelligence test.

Second, where do ability and trait emotional intelligence fit in the domain space of SEECs? As discussed above, we expect trait emotional intelligence to overlap with the dimensions underlying established SEECs, given similar subscale labels and item wordings. For example, emotionality from the Petrides and Furnham (2003) emotional intelligence model might measure essentially the same as certain facets of empathy (Davis, 1983) or emotional and social sensitivity (Riggio & Carney, 2003). For ability emotional intelligence, we predict a substantial correlation with emotion recognition ability, which is a basic emotional intelligence component, and less overlap with self-reported SEECs because of the different measurement approaches. However, given the common conceptual origin of all emotional intelligence models (Cherniss, 2010) ability emotional intelligence should not be independent from trait emotional intelligence and self-reported SEECs.

Finally, how are the SEEC dimensions related to personality? A criticism often raised with respect to trait emotional intelligence is that it overlaps largely with personality. In their meta-analysis, Joseph and Newman (2010) found correlations between .26 and .45 with all Big Five traits, namely agreeableness, extraversion, conscientiousness, openness, and emotional stability (reverse-coded neuroticism). In fact, the same criticism might be applicable to SEECs more generally. For instance, Gurtman (1999) suggested that social skills and interpersonal competence can be considered a blend of extraversion, dominance, and agreeableness. The dimensional approach used in the present study will help to disentangle the relationship between specific SEEC components and personality traits.

2. Method

One hundred and forty seven French-speaking students (male = 62) of various disciplines were recruited at the University of Geneva and completed the study for payment. Mean age was 25.40 ($SD = 7.45$).

Participants completed three performance-based measures: The Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT, Mayer et al., 2003), Multimodal Emotion Recognition Test (MERT,

Bänziger, Grandjean, & Scherer, 2009), and the short version of the Profile of Nonverbal Sensitivity (MiniPONS, Bänziger, Scherer, Hall, & Rosenthal, 2011). The MSCEIT includes 141 items distributed over eight tasks such as identifying the causes for certain emotions or solving problems using different moods. In the MERT and MiniPONS, participants are asked to watch (or listen to, respectively) short video clips, still pictures, or audio recordings of actors expressing different emotions and affective states, and to indicate which emotion or state was being expressed by the actor. Responses are coded as correct or incorrect and yield modality-specific and total emotion recognition scores.

Furthermore, we administered six self-report questionnaires, namely the Big Five Inventory (BFI, John, Donahue, & Kentle, 1991), Social Skills Inventory (SSI, Riggio & Carney, 2003), Interpersonal Competence Questionnaire (ICQ, Buhrmester et al., 1988), Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI, Davis, 1983), Political Skill Inventory (PSI, Ferris et al., 2005), and the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (TEIQU, Petrides & Furnham, 2003). The subscales of each measure as provided in the respective citation are displayed in Table 1. Detailed information on the measures can be found in the Supplementary material. Participants completed the study online in four blocks (block 1: all questionnaires and demographic information, block 2: MSCEIT, block 3: MiniPONS, block 4: MERT) and were allowed to take breaks after each block. The total duration of the study without breaks was 2 h 30 min.

Data was analyzed by calculating the mean scores of the 32 subscales of the eight instruments (without the BFI, see Table 1) and running a Principal Component Analysis (PCA) on the correlation matrix. We used PCA because our goal was to explore whether the various instruments measuring SEECs can be reduced to a smaller number of composite variables which would help organizing the field. It was beyond the scope of this analysis to propose theoretically motivated latent variables that influenced participants' responses on the observed variables, for which exploratory factor analysis would have been the more appropriate method. The number of components to extract was determined with parallel analysis implemented in the "paran" package in R (Dinno, 2009). Parallel analysis adjusts the number of components to extract by the number of components that would be derived from random data. The extracted components were rotated using the oblique Promax rotation method, as we assumed that SEEC components might be correlated. We displayed the correlations between the 32 variables in a correlation plot with the qgraph package in R (Epskamp, Cramer, Waldorp, Schmittmann, & Borsboom, 2011). This plot visualizes the relationships between the subscales and helps understanding the nature of the identified components. Finally, we calculated component scores and correlated them with the mean scores on the Big Five dimensions.

3. Results

According to the results of the parallel analysis, four components were extracted that explained 54% of the variance. The Promax-rotated component matrix was readily interpretable (see Table 1): Scales loading on the first component measured proactive, expressive, and confident behaviors and traits, like Initiation (ICQ), Interpersonal Influence (PSI), and Sociability (TEIQU). Individuals scoring high on scales of this component or dimension that we labeled "Expressivity" tend to describe themselves as successful in communicating their needs and desires and at achieving their interpersonal goals. The second component consisted of scales such as Empathic Concern (IRI), Emotional Sensitivity (SSI), and Empathic Support (ICQ) that are characterized by (self-reported) sensitivity and supportive behavior towards others. We thus labeled this dimension "Sensitivity". The performance-based

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