

PSIWORLD 2014

# Emotional intelligence and the tendency to use dysfunctional cognitive schemas

Odette Dimitriu\*, Mihaela Negrescu

*Faculty of Psychology, Titu Maiorescu University, Calea Văcărești, nr. 187, sector 4, Bucharest, 040051, Romania  
The National Intelligence Academy Mihai Viteazul, Șoseaua Odăi, nr. 20-22, sector 1, Bucharest, Romania*

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## Abstract

The present study investigates the connection between emotional intelligence and the tendency to use certain dysfunctional cognitive schemas. We started from the hypothesis that emotional intelligence, or some of its components are negatively correlated with the tendency to use certain types or categories of dysfunctional cognitive schemas. The hypothesis was validated, therefore the stage of development of the emotional intelligence (and we mean the global, total score) has an influence on the tendency for dysfunctional thinking. On the other hand, however, when we analysed the inter-scale correlations, the results are more nuanced, some of them validates the hypotheses, others contradicting them, as detailed below.

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Peer-review under responsibility of the Scientific Committee of PSIWORLD 2014.

*Keywords:* emotional intelligence, dysfunctional cognitive schemas; Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Emotional Schema Therapy (EST)

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## 1. Introduction and theoretical perspectives

Emotional intelligence (EQ) is the ability to perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). People with a high EQ have a richer language when it comes to expressing emotions, and they distinguish multiple nuances. They have the ability to use the language of emotion and are capable to distinguish complex or contradictory emotions and, once they identify them, they accept

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\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +4-0213222667, mobile +40748222202  
E-mail address: [odimitriu@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:odimitriu@yahoo.co.uk)

them openly and are honest with themselves. Last but not least, they are able to use their will in order to purge an emotion, when it is not beneficial to them.

In the past years, several tools to measure this particular type of intelligence have been developed. Although the idea was popularized by Goleman in his books, which have been translated in numerous languages, the term itself has first appeared in Wayne Leon Payne's doctoral dissertation from 1985, designating "an ability which implies a creative relation with states of anxiety, pain and desire." He wrote his unpublished doctoral dissertation which included the term emotional intelligence in the title, *A Study of Emotion: Developing Emotional Intelligence* from 1985.

At present, emotional intelligence is regarded as a collection of attitudes related to the processing of emotional information (Bar-On & Parker, 2012). These authors consider that thinking and emotions are processes that positively influence each other, as it can be seen clearly from their definition of emotional intelligence as "the ability to perceive emotions and their significance, as well as to efficiently regulate emotionality in order to bring about a better emotional and intellectual development". As a result of thorough research in the field, Bar-On & Parker (2012) group the components of emotional intelligence as follows: intra-personal aspect - becoming aware of one's own emotions, assertiveness, self-respect, self-realization, independence; interpersonal aspect - empathy, harmonious interpersonal relations, social responsibility; adaptability - problem solving, reality testing, flexibility; stress management - stress endurance, impulse control; mood status: happiness, optimism.

On the other hand, schemas are cognitive structures consisting of a person's core beliefs and assumptions developed early in life (Beck and Weishaar, 2005). These cognitive structures, which are borrowed from the information processing paradigm, support and influence the way in which we construct our current experiences and they lead to the establishment of new sets of information. In other words, the personal schemas are particularly organized entities which include the individual's knowledge about self and about the world. They act as implicit rules which organize and guide the individual's set of information, influencing the way in which the individual assesses an event. One of the major objectives of the Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy is to challenge ingrained dysfunctional beliefs of the patient and to develop more adaptive and more purposeful cognitive schemas.

## 2. Objectives and hypothesis

The objective of the present study is to investigate the link between emotional intelligence and the tendency to use certain dysfunctional cognitive schemas.

We have started from the hypothesis that certain components of the emotional intelligence are negatively correlated with the tendency to employ certain types or categories of dysfunctional cognitive schemas, as follows: the predisposition to use dysfunctional cognitive schemas from the *disconnection and rejection* category may be negatively correlated with the stage of development of the social abilities; the tendency to use dysfunctional cognitive schemas from the *autonomy and performance* category may be negatively correlated with the ability of self-motivation; the tendency to use dysfunctional cognitive schemas from the *impaired limits* category can be negatively correlated with the development stage of one's social abilities and of self-consciousness; the tendency to use dysfunctional cognitive schemas from the *other-directedness* category may be negatively correlated with the ability of self-motivation and with the development of self-consciousness; the tendency to use dysfunctional cognitive schemas from the *hyper-vigilance and inhibition* category may be negatively correlated with the ability of self-motivation and self-regulation.

## 3. Subjects

The present study involved of 120 participants, aged between 18 and 60 years, 51 of them males and 69 females. 75% of the subjects have a college degree (in psychology, economy, law, or engineering) and the remaining 25% of them are high-school graduates.

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