



Review

The relationship between emotional intelligence and trait mindfulness: A meta-analytic review

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ABSTRACT

According to theory, emotional intelligence (EI) and trait mindfulness should be positively associated with each other; nevertheless, the reported effect sizes of this relationship were mixed across studies. This meta-analysis was done to clarify this line of research. The analysis found that (1) EI had a statistically significant association with trait mindfulness (overall EI: $\hat{\rho} = 0.48$; self-report EI: $\hat{\rho} = 0.48$; mixed EI: $\hat{\rho} = 0.49$); (2) gender did not moderate the relationship between EI and trait mindfulness; (3) age was a statistically significant moderator of the relationship between EI and trait mindfulness (the association was stronger for older subjects); and (4) the type of scale used was a statistically significant moderator of the relationship between EI and trait mindfulness (FFMQ: $\hat{\rho} = 0.72$; FMI: $\hat{\rho} = 0.79$; MAAS: $\hat{\rho} = 0.38$; other scales: $\hat{\rho} = 0.60$).

1. Introduction

According to Brown and Ryan (2003), mindfulness is “most commonly defined as the state of being attentive to and aware of what is taking place in the present” (p. 822). They described it as a type of enhanced attention and they contrasted mindfulness with situations where people may be distracted from the present moment by anxieties or fantasies, preoccupied by multitasking, or behaving compulsively or automatically. Mindfulness also involves attending to the present moment in a nonjudgmental or accepting way (Baer, Smith, & Allen, 2004; Giluk, 2009; Kabat-Zinn, 1994). Trait mindfulness includes the disposition to be aware of one's emotions (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Brown and Ryan (2003) stated, “For example, in speaking with a friend, one can be highly attentive to the communication and sensitively aware of the perhaps subtle emotional tone underlying it” (p. 823). Likewise, emotional intelligence (EI) also encompasses being aware of one's emotions (as well as others' emotions). Best-selling EI authors, such as Daniel Goleman (1995), have also published on mindfulness (Goleman, Langer, David, & Congleton, 2017). Thus, researchers have begun to examine how the two constructs are related (e.g., Schutte & Malouff, 2011; Wright & Schutte, 2014).

Research findings indicate that mindfulness encourages the development of a set of key abilities or competencies comprising EI, and that EI may be a mediating variable between mindfulness and positive outcomes (Schutte & Malouff, 2011). For example, Schutte and Malouff

(2011) used the Assessing Emotions Scale (AES, Schutte, Malouff, & Bhullar, 2009; Schutte et al., 1998) to examine whether mindfulness is associated with EI and with subjective well-being. The AES measures how proficiently people identify, understand, regulate, and harness emotions in themselves and others. They concluded (2011, p. 1116) that “Higher levels of mindfulness were associated with greater emotional intelligence, positive affect, and life satisfaction and lower negative affect. ... Emotional intelligence mediated between mindfulness and higher positive affect, lower negative affect, and greater life satisfaction.” Likewise, Bao, Xue, and Kong (2015) found that mindfulness predicted all four dimensions of the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS, Self-Emotion Appraisals, Others' Emotion Appraisals, Regulation of Emotion, and Use of Emotion; Wong & Law, 2002). Moreover, they found that two of the dimensions (Regulation of Emotion, Use of Emotion) partially mediated the effects of mindfulness on perceived stress.

The mechanisms underlying mindfulness involve one's receptive attention to psychological states, which resemble the construct of EI because one aspect of EI relates to perceptual clarity about one's emotional states (Brown & Ryan, 2003). That is why EI has been routinely included as a variable in the studies that have focused on the scale development of mindfulness. These studies needed to demonstrate mindfulness's association with related variables such as EI (e.g., Baer, Smith, Hopkins, Krietemeyer, & Toney, 2006; Brown & Ryan, 2003). Despite the plausible relation between EI and trait mindfulness, the

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reported effect sizes across studies regarding this relation were highly mixed, ranging from weak (around 0.10) to strong (around 0.70). For example, Heidari and Morovati (2016) reported a correlation of 0.15, whereas Wright and Schutte (2014) reported a correlation of 0.70 for the relationship between EI and trait mindfulness. Hence, this meta-analysis aims to report an overall estimate of the relationship between EI and trait mindfulness. This study also aims to explore what accounts for the heterogeneity in effect sizes across studies from both conceptual and methodological perspectives. A meta-analytic integration is a much-needed addition to the fast growing EI and trait mindfulness literature. This meta-analysis aims to clarify the empirical landscape of the research regarding EI – trait mindfulness and pinpoint the areas where more research is needed.

2. Theory and hypotheses

2.1. EI

EI is an emotion-related individual difference variable that has underpinned a substantial portion of the work on emotion, especially at the micro level of analysis (Ashkanasy, Humphrey, & Huy, 2017). EI can be classified into three types, which are ability EI, self-report EI, and mixed EI (Ashkanasy & Daus, 2005; Miao, Humphrey, & Qian, 2017a). Ability EI measures are based on the concept that EI is a type of intelligence, and like traditional cognitive intelligence measures, they use objective right and wrong questions to assess EI (Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 1999). For example, the Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT V2.0) (Mayer, Salovey, Caruso, & Sitarenios, 2003) measures four branches of abilities: (a) emotional perception; (b) using emotions to facilitate thought; (c) understanding emotions; and (d) managing emotions (Mayer, Roberts, & Barsade, 2008).

Although some EI scholars conceptualize EI as a type of intelligence, many others in the self-report and mixed EI categories view it as a type of trait. For example, Petrides and his co-authors state that trait EI is “a constellation of behavioral dispositions and self-perceptions concerning one’s ability to recognize, process, and utilize emotion-laden information.” (Petrides, Frederickson, & Furnham, 2004, p. 278). Furthermore, Petrides, Pita, & Kokkinaki (2007) examined how the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (TEIQue) (Petrides, 2009a, 2009b; Petrides & Furnham, 2003) relates to other personality constructs. They used “factor analyses to determine the location of trait EI in Eysenckian and Big Five factor space. The results showed that trait EI is a compound personality construct located at the lower levels of the two taxonomies.” (Petrides, Pita, et al., 2007, p. 273). They maintain that this lends credibility to the “conceptualization of trait EI as a lower-order construct that comprehensively encompasses the emotion-related facets of personality” (Petrides, Pita, et al., 2007, p. 287). Their arguments and results suggest that trait EI should also encompass the emotion-related facets of mindfulness.

EI scales in the EI self-report category include the Workgroup Emotional Intelligence Profile (WEIP, Jordan, Ashkanasy, Hartel, & Hooper, 2002; Jordan & Troth, 2011) and the WLEIS (Wong & Law, 2002) previously described. These two EI self-report scales are based on the four branches of the Mayer et al. (1999) theoretical model but use self-reports instead of ability items.

Mixed EI measures are also based on self-report measures but contain a wider set of variables (e.g., a mix of competencies, behaviors, and/or skills). For example, Bar-On, Brown, Kirkcaldy, and Thome (2000) defined the Bar-On EQ-i as a type of noncognitive intelligence, and state, “Noncognitive intelligence is defined as an array of emotional, personal, and social abilities and skills that influence an individual’s ability to cope effectively with environmental demands and pressures” (p. 1108). According to the Bar-On manual (Bar-On, 1997, p. 1; Bar-On, 2004), the EQ-i consists of five factors and associated subscales: “(1) Intrapersonal (Self-Regard, Emotional Self-Awareness,

Assertiveness, Independence, and Self Actualization); (2) Interpersonal (Empathy, Social Responsibility, and Interpersonal Relationship); (3) Stress Management (Stress Tolerance and Impulse Control); (4) Adaptability (Reality Testing, Flexibility, and Problem Solving); and (5) General Mood Scale (Optimism and Happiness).” Likewise, the Emotional and Social Competency Inventory (ESCI) has 14 dimensions, which include emotion-related traits, skills, and competencies (Boyatzis, Brizz, & Godwin, 2011).

EI has predicted various psychological, behavioral, work-related, and non-work related outcomes, such as job performance, job satisfaction, leadership effectiveness, leadership behaviors, organizational commitment, turnover intention, academic performance, health, and job resources (Boyatzis, Smith, Van Oosten, & Woolford, 2013; Goleman, 1995; Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2013; Miao, Humphrey, & Qian, 2016, 2017b, 2018; Miao et al., 2017a; O’Boyle, Humphrey, Pollack, Hawver, & Story, 2011; Petrides et al., 2004; Schutte, Malouff, Thorsteinsson, Bhullar, & Rooke, 2007). Research findings have also demonstrated that EI contributes incremental variance in predicting various criteria after controlling for Big Five personality traits, cognitive ability, positive and negative affectivity, self-rated job performance, and/or general self-efficacy (Andrei, Siegling, Aloe, Baldaro, & Petrides, 2016; Miao, Humphrey, & Qian, 2017c; Petrides, Pérez-González, & Furnham, 2007).

2.2. Mindfulness

There exist some disagreements over the nature and definition of mindfulness, as well as the factor structure of mindfulness (Petrides, Gómez, & Pérez-González, 2017; Siegling & Petrides, 2014). Nevertheless, researchers appear to agree that “(a) mindfulness can be achieved without meditation; (b) attaining a mindful state is an inherent human capability; (c) mindfulness is both a state and a trait; anyone can attain a state of mindfulness but there are individual differences in tendency toward mindfulness; and (d) mindfulness is not always deliberate; sometimes it can occur subconsciously” (p. 81, Mesmer-Magnus, Manapragada, Viswesvaran, & Allen, 2017). Research indicates that mindfulness and/or mindfulness-based therapy or exercises might improve well-being, mitigate clinical and nonclinical problems (e.g., anxiety, stress, depression, negative feeling, pain, and burnout, etc.), and result in positive work outcomes (e.g., improved work performance, job satisfaction, and social relations) (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2017; Schutte & Malouff, 2011; Wright & Schutte, 2014).

2.3. The relationship between EI and trait mindfulness

Mindfulness stimulates the development of emotional regulation and enhances people’s recognition of their own and others’ emotions; further, the nonjudgmental and self-regulating aspects of mindfulness may enable individuals to more accurately decipher their own and others’ emotions and to possess better emotion management capacities (Schutte & Malouff, 2011; Wang & Kong, 2014). Mindfulness is associated with adaptive emotional functioning and helps to reorient individuals away from maladaptive processes, thus minimizing psychological distress (Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2017; Schutte & Malouff, 2011). Hence, some of the core aspects of trait mindfulness are related to emotion regulation and emotion perception, which are also core components of EI. This leads to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1. *EI is positively related to trait mindfulness.*

2.4. Conceptual and methodological moderators

There is considerable debate in the literature about whether men and women differ in their levels of EI, and women are often assumed to have higher EI. In contrast to this perspective, Taylor and Hood’s (2011)

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