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Measured and self-estimated trait emotional intelligence in a UK sample of managers



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ABSTRACT

Trait emotional intelligence (EI) was measured and self-estimated in a UK sample of 128 managers (52.3% female), recruited at a professional services firm. Participants' measured scores were compared to standardization sample data and gender differences in measured and estimated scores, as well as in estimation bias and accuracy were examined. As hypothesized, managers' global trait EI scores were significantly higher than those of the normative sample of the measure used, although the scores of female participants were largely responsible for this difference. Gender-specific hypotheses were confirmed for measured scores (differences only hypothesized at the factor level) and estimation accuracy (males estimating their trait EI more accurately), but not for estimated scores (female participants had higher estimates, but the opposite was hypothesized). Further, female managers showed signs of estimation bias.

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1. Measured and self-estimated trait emotional intelligence in a UK sample of managers

Management of human capital has been portrayed as one of the major settings for the relevance and application of emotional intelligence (EI). In part, the importance which EI has been ascribed in the managerial world is linked to its marketing potential within this context; the construct is readily sellable in the form of assessments, training programs, and interventions. One the other hand, the occupational demands associated with various types of management draw on the specific characteristics subsumed by the prevailing EI models and measures (e.g., Bar-On, 1997; Petrides, 2009a). Emotion-related qualities seem to be fundamental to professional success and adjustment within this diverse capacity, suggesting that managers may constitute a high EI population.

Although there has been a surge of studies on managerial samples or in managerial contexts, much of this research has treated "EI" as a general concept, rather than considering the two more specific constructs tapped by various measures. Since the construct's inception and popularization (Goleman, 1995), the field has gradually diverged into two streams of research, focusing on two complementary dimensions termed ability EI and trait EI, respectively. Ability EI concerns emotion-related abilities measured through maximum-performance tasks, whereas trait EI refers

to the emotion-related personality dimension assessed through typical-performance measures. It has been argued that any typical-performance measure of EI is most appropriately interpreted through the trait EI lens, independent of the underlying model (Petrides & Furnham, 2001). This assertion and the distinctiveness of the two constructs is supported by non-significant to modest correlations between typical- and maximum-performance EI measures and moderate to strong correlations between measures based on the same method (Van Rooy, Viswesvaran, & Pluta, 2005).

The operationalization-based split into two relatively distinct constructs, which has implications for the interpretation of findings gathered with a given measure, needs to be considered in research with special-interest populations, such as managers. One cannot generalize from one construct (i.e., trait or ability EI) and its operational vehicles to the other, as divergent findings can be expected from the two (Petrides & Furnham, 2001). The focus of the present study is on managers' trait EI, and a concise review of studies assessing trait EI in managerial samples is provided next.

1.1. Literature review

We retrieved 10 studies in which managers' EI was assessed with typical-performance measures and, thus, representative of trait EI.¹ The samples used in these studies varied considerably in

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¹ Due to the abundance of research in this area, we focused on studies in which samples were explicitly identified as managers, using relevant search terms. However, managers may have comprised samples of other studies or parts of them, without being specified as managers.

geographic locations and ethnicities (e.g., China, UK, Australia, and Israel), occupational sectors (e.g., CFOs, restaurant franchises, public services, retailers, construction industry) and managerial levels. Seven of the ten studies employed workplace-oriented EI scales (Angelidis & Ibrahim, 2012; Gardner & Stough, 2002; Sy, Tram, & O'Hara, 2006). Unfortunately, these types of EI measures are unlikely to reveal much about managers' trait EI (relative to the general population), since they were standardized on samples comprising managers, leaders, or people in similar roles. Therefore, we restrict our focus on the results gathered with general-population scales.

Different general EI scales were used in three studies. The Trait Meta-Mood Scale (TMMS; Salovey, Mayer, Goldman, Turvey, & Palfai, 1995) was administered to an Australian female-only sample of managers from various industries (Downey, Papageorgiou, & Stough, 2006). Sample scale means were 3.94 for Attention ($SD = 0.57$), 4.22 for Clarity ($SD = 0.57$), and 4.23 ($SD = 0.58$) for Repair. In comparison, a sample of undergraduate students had scale means of 4.10 ($SD = 0.52$) for Attention, 3.27 ($SD = 0.70$) for Clarity, and 3.59 ($SD = 0.90$) for Repair (Salovey, Stroud, Woolery, & Epel, 2002). The Bar-On (1997) Emotional Quotient Inventory was administered to a sample of 191 middle managers (line managers; 69% male) working for a major UK retailer (Slaski & Cartwright, 2002). The overall EI sample mean of 94.4 ($SD = 12.5$) was lower than the normative sample mean of 100. Moreover, Schutte et al. (1998) Assessing Emotions Scale was completed by a sample of 98 senior managers (89% male) employed as CFOs in local government authorities in Israel (Carmeli, 2003). The sample mean was 3.71 ($SD = 0.37$), which was above the normative sample means for women ($M = 3.45$, $SD = 0.46$) and very similar to that of men ($M = 3.78$, $SD = .50$).

The number of relevant studies is too sparse and their findings insufficiently consistent to suggest that managers are particularly high in trait EI. Importantly, the samples used in these studies varied widely in occupational sectors and managerial levels, making it difficult to tease apart the effects of management and work-domain. Another limitation concerns the use of different measures varying in subscales, with one (the Trait Meta-Mood Scale) comprising three weakly interrelated factors. A benchmark measure of trait EI, the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire, was used in one managerial context (Mikolajczak, Balon, Ruosi, & Kotsou, 2012), but no sample means were reported in this study. Furthermore, studies on managerial samples have tended to neglect the role of gender, despite its importance in EI research (e.g., Siegling, Saklofske, Vesely, & Nordstokke, 2012).

Another pertinent factor not previously considered is managers' holistic self-evaluation of their emotional adjustment. Self-perceptions are important for several reasons and have been studied for some time, particularly in the context of IQ and performance. It is conceivable that they have a profound influence on the kind of tasks people engage in or avoid, and on the kind of careers pursued. Further, positive self-perceptions are linked to mental health, in contrast to negative self-evaluations, which are linked to negative affect and depression (Petrides & Furnham, 2000). Although previous research has examined EI self-perceptions in university students, with a particular focus on gender differences (Petrides & Furnham, 2000; Petrides, Furnham, & Martin, 2004), self-perceptions of managers may differ in myriad ways from university samples in terms of perception accuracy, bias, and gender differences.

1.2. Present study

This study examined the trait EI profiles of a general managerial sample comprising of managers from different levels and not tied to any specific type of service. Participants' trait EI scores were examined for gender differences and compared to normative

sample data. Departing from the bulk of management-related studies, in which trait EI was assessed with workplace-oriented scales, this study used the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (TEIQue), a scale designed to measure the construct comprehensively in the general population. We also examined managers' overall self-estimates of trait EI, focusing on gender differences, estimation bias, and estimation accuracy. These self-perceptions were referenced against the TEIQue model to facilitate direct comparison with the measured trait EI scores. The following hypotheses were tested:

H1: Participants' measured trait EI scores will be higher than those of the normative sample of the TEIQue. Although our review of the literature did not yield conclusive evidence, this hypothesis is based on the particular importance of emotional resilience and socioemotional functioning in the managerial world. The argument is that emotionally resilient people are more likely to be selected for, or to advance to managerial positions.

H2a: There will be no gender difference in managers' global trait EI scores. Although the normative sample mean is significantly higher for males (Petrides, 2009b), gender differences were not apparent in other samples (e.g., Siegling et al., 2012) and female managers may be particularly well adjusted compared to women in the general population. However, as has been quite reliably found, we also hypothesized, H2b: Male managers will score higher on the Self-Control factor than female managers, who will be higher on the Emotionality factor.

H3: Male managers will have significantly higher estimated global trait EI scores than female managers when controlling for measured scores, consistent with previous findings from participants recruited at British universities (Petrides & Furnham, 2000). This hypothesis also reflects self-enhancing and self-derogatory biases in men and women, respectively, which have been demonstrated for self-evaluations more generally.

H4: Male managers will have more accurate estimates than female managers, also based on previous findings in British university students (Petrides & Furnham, 2000).

2. Method

2.1. Participants and Procedure

We invited 339 managers from senior, middle, and junior levels at a large professional services firm to participate in this study. Of this group, 128 (37.8%) managers with a mean age of 38.0 years ($SD = 7.5$, age range: 26–59 years) participated (three participants [2 male, 1 female] did not indicate their age). The gender split amongst the participants was almost equal (52.3% female), but the representation of the three managerial levels was uneven; the majority came from middle management ($n = 79$, 50.6% female), whereas similar sample proportions were senior ($n = 27$, 40.7% female) and junior managers ($n = 22$, 72.7% female). The mean ages of male and female participants were 39.1 years ($SD = 7.9$) and 36.9 years ($SD = 7.1$), respectively.

The average length of time worked at the firm was 6.2 years ($SD = 6.0$) for the overall sample, 6.7 years ($SD = 6.9$) for male managers, and 5.8 years ($SD = 5.0$) for female managers. The majority of respondents (78.1%) indicated their ethnic background as Caucasian, others as Black, Asian, and Indian/Pakistani. Educational backgrounds in terms of the highest level of education attained varied considerably: 2.5% GCSEs/O-levels, 15.6% A-levels or similar, 53.9% BA/BSc or similar, 21.1% MA/MSc or similar, and 2.3% MBA (six participants did not indicate their highest level of education). After providing demographic and background information, trait EI was assessed and self-estimated. The study was conducted anonymously online.

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