Confirmatory factor structure of trait emotional intelligence in student and worker samples

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Abstract

Growing interest in emotional intelligence (EI) led us to evaluate the factor structure of six core trait-EI facets from Salovey and Mayer (1990), assess the stability of the core factor structure across student ($N = 184$) and worker ($N = 225$) samples, and explore relations between core EI dimensions and four proximal outcomes from the same model. A three-factor structure, including *Self Orientation*, *Other Orientation*, and *Emotional Sharing*, replicated well across samples (fit indices range: .93–.98 per sample). Relations involving EI outcomes were less consistent. We conclude that trait-EI warrants assessment as specific facets rather than a global construct, core trait-EI structure may be stable across populations, and EI applications are context-specific.
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1. Introduction

Emotional intelligence (EI) is attracting increasing attention in academic and popular media (e.g., Cooper & Sawaf, 1996; Davies, Stankov, & Roberts, 1998; Goleman, 1995, 1998). While

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there has been much discussion of the importance of EI, and some evidence supporting the validity of EI measures (Abraham, 2000; Jordan, Ashkanasy, Hartel, & Hooper, 2002; Slaski & Cartwright, 2002; Tett, Fox, & Wang, 2005; Wong & Law, 2002), important questions remain regarding its dimensionality, measurement, and relationships with relevant variables. The current study was conducted to (a) assess the factor structure of six core EI facets, (b) assess the stability of the core factor structure across student and worker populations, and (c) explore relations between core EI factors and four proximal outcomes.

There are two dominant approaches to conceptualizing and measuring EI. As an ability or skill, EI is a *capacity* to engage in valued and trainable behavior and best measured in terms of right and wrong answers (e.g., Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2000). EI has also been identified as a relatively stable *inclination* or *propensity* suitable for self-description (e.g., Petrides & Furnham, 2003). This distinction is the subject of ongoing discussion (Austin, 2004; Davies et al., 1998; Mayer et al., 2000; Roberts, Zeidner, & Matthews, 2001; Sakofske, Austin, & Minski, 2003). For present purposes, EI is conceptualized as "a constellation of *behavioral dispositions* and *self-perceptions* concerning one's ability to recognize, process, and utilize emotion-laden information" (Petrides & Furnham, 2003, p. 278; italics in original). Following Petrides and Furnham (2000a, 2000b, 2001, 2003) and others (e.g., Austin, Saklofske, Huang, & Kenney, 2004), we refer to this orientation as "trait-EI" to distinguish it from ability-based perspectives, and consider the two approaches as complementary.

1.1. The structure of trait emotional intelligence

EI is generally recognized as multi-dimensional, but the number and nature of EI facets is unclear. In their influential paper, Salovey and Mayer (1990) offered a 10-component model with six core facets and four "utilizations." Our primary aim here was to assess the factor structure of the six core facets in light of recent related findings. The model is depicted in Fig. 1 and construct descriptions with sample items are provided in Table 1.
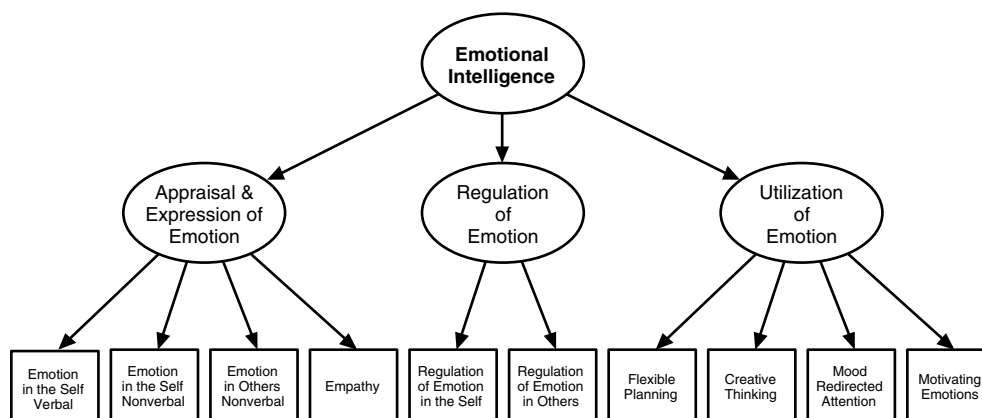

Fig. 1. Salovey and Mayer's (1990) model of emotional intelligence.