

# Emotional Intelligence Today – What You Need to Know for Testing, Training and Development

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Imagine the following scenario. Your company has just updated its performance and leadership development model, completing an exhaustive process of mapping technical as well as “softer” skills and abilities associated with leadership and managerial success. Your job is to ensure that testing and training content are in place to support this model of leadership success. You are particularly intrigued by one of the areas identified in the model: “emotional intelligence” (EI). Though your organization has not previously used EI assessments or training, you reason that it should not be too hard to identify products to meet your company’s needs. After all, you know that more and more companies have been recognizing EI as integral to success in executive and leadership roles. With this popularity, you anticipate no shortage of EI tools from which to choose. You also suspect that one EI tool or approach would be quite similar to any other. And, you seem to recall that one of the popular approaches to EI is based on “competencies”. That sounds close to what your organization is tracking: maybe that’s the direction to take.

This scenario is not merely imaginary. It is a situation many HR professionals are currently addressing. EI has received a lot of attention over the past several years. Companies are recognizing that for many positions, optimal performance requires more than just formal intelligence. EI is also necessary. Recently, there have been a number of significant developments and advances in the area of EI. The best way to proceed when considering an EI program or strategy is neither as simple nor as straightforward as it once was. HR practitioners operating with a current sense of EI can avoid potential pitfalls and take full advantage of the most current models and practices.

If tasked with developing an effective EI strategy for your organization, a bit of investigative work will let you make a well-informed decision. Key questions to guide your efforts will be addressed in this article, and include:

1. What does my company mean when using the term “emotional intelligence”, and why is this viewed as being important within the organization?
2. How many EI models/approaches are there in today’s marketplace? What options do I have?
3. Which model is best for my company’s needs and objectives?

## **Just what is meant by the term “emotional intelligence”?**

The answer that you hear depends largely on whom you ask.

You might hear anything ranging from “achievement drive” to “optimism”. Some would argue that EI is a re-formatting of standard leadership attributes and talents (Goleman). Others would suggest that EI is a cluster of personality traits that promote well-being and self-actualization (Bar-On). And yet another viewpoint defines EI as a set of specific abilities that capture a distinct type of intelligence - a capacity for thinking, reasoning and learning about emotions (Mayer, Salovey and Caruso).

If you are surprised by this current state of EI affairs, you are in very good company! Academics and practitioners across many areas of psychology and organizational behavior are engaged in a spirited debate about EI – what it actually is, how it is best measured, and what organizational performance outcomes it might help explain or even predict.

As an HR professional, it is now more important than ever to know how the top models of EI differ and how appropriate each might be relative to your organization’s training and development needs.

## **Is there more than one EI model out in the marketplace?**

Yes, there are several models of EI from which an HR practitioner might choose. Though some fundamental similarities exist, the models differ in significant ways. Clear choices are available to the informed HR practitioner. The three predominant models are:

### EI as Leadership Competencies –

Arguably, the most popularized view of EI is that of Dan Goleman. Goleman’s EI is a framework that attempts to capture a person’s potential for mastering a range of competencies (broadly represented by Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, Relationship Management) and how these might translate into success in the workplace. Goleman and his colleagues rely largely on a 360° instrument (the Emotional Competence Inventory-ECI) to evaluate a person’s capacity for EI.

### EI as Personality Traits and Characteristics –

Pre-dating Goleman is a model developed by Reuven Bar-On. Bar-On was interested in better understanding the psychological basis for well-being, and his conceptualization of EI is based in personal attributes that include resilience and optimism, along with many others. At its most fundamental level, this approach provides an estimate of a person’s capacity to effectively cope with pressures and

demands of daily life. Five broad domains are assessed through self-report and/or 360° instruments. EQ (“emotional quotient”) scores are developed for each of these areas: Intrapersonal Skills, Interpersonal Skills, Adaptability, Stress Management, and General Mood. The notion that personality can play a meaningful role within the broad context of emotional competence holds a great deal of value.

### EI As A Distinct Intelligence And Set of Abilities

John Mayer and Peter Salovey (later joined by David Caruso) were the first investigators to coin the term “emotional intelligence”. The Mayer-Salovey-Caruso ability model views EI as a unique intelligence comprised of measurable abilities in four areas of performance. These are the abilities to accurately perceive emotions, use emotions to facilitate thought, understand complex emotions and transitions between stages of emotions, and integrate data and emotions to devise effective problem solving strategies.

The Mayer-Salovey-Caruso approach is based on the idea that a model of EI should have something to do both with emotions and intelligence. One unique aspect of the ability model of EI is that it views emotions working together with thinking rather than as working in opposition to thinking. Emotions are recognized as containing data and information that can be used to optimize decisions.

Only this model treats EI as a new form of intelligence – an ability to understand and to reason with emotional information and to combine thought and emotion to effectively perform in specific situations. This is one of the exciting new developments in the field of EI, and is unique to the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso view. This view of EI as an intelligence creates a unique focus on measuring EI through actual mental performance rather than self-reported personality traits, behavior observed by others, or competency levels that a person might or might not actually possess. Almost 15 years of research has allowed Mayer, Salovey and Caruso to support the case for EI representing a new type of intelligence. As a result of their efforts, there is now a new tool to objectively assess EI abilities: the MSCEIT (Mayer, Salovey, Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test). This test measures and provides skills scores on the four core emotional abilities that form the basis of the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso model.

### **Which model is best for your company’s needs and objectives?**

The answer to this question will rest largely on conclusions of your company’s needs analysis. Why is EI considered to be significant to your organization? Is the value perceived to exist within a broad set of leadership attributes or from more precise skills in specific jobs? Should you be responsible for evaluating EI models for use within your organization, the following points might be helpful.

### Clarity

- Be clear on whether you want a model that actually treats EI as an intelligence, or whether you are interested in a version of EI that is based in either personality traits or leadership competencies. Some companies prefer a model that clearly tracks along with both words used in the term “EI”: emotions and intelligence. If choosing the personality or leadership approach, you will also want to determine that these measures are adequately different from personality assessments or leadership tools that might already be used within your organization (e.g. NEO and other “big five” personality assessments) – to ensure that any new tools contribute additional value to what is already in place.

### Measurement

- Have a good understanding of how EI is measured in each model, and recognize that none of these three approaches is perfect. Try to remain true to what you have identified as important to measure (ability? personality? competency?) and go with the corresponding model. For example, if your organization values the idea of EI as an intelligence, then you would likely want to use the MSCEIT and the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso model. This is the only approach supported by a measurement tool that follows the rigorous requirements of an intelligence test.

### Training or Development?

- Also influencing your selection of a model should be your organization’s primary intent in using an EI program. Is the company primarily interested in applying EI for skills training or for general development? The more precise ability-based Mayer- Salovey-Caruso model might lend itself more effectively to specific skill-building training programs. For development around broader traits or leadership attributes Bar-on or Goleman models might appropriately be considered.

### **Conclusion**

The allure of EI is that it offers a different look at what it means to be smart. The notion that EI matters at work is very compelling. We all have seen work-related situations where emotions and feelings have had very real impacts on the quality of interactions, relationships, and outcomes. Smart behaviors and decisions result from a number of different factors. Emotions play a key role in a wide range of organizational outcomes.

At a basic level, there does appear to be some common agreement among the three approaches to EI. Goleman, among others, has acknowledged that all EI theories recognize the importance of four basic components. These are how well a person:

- Perceives emotions
- Understands emotions
- Utilizes emotions to predict outcomes

- Manages emotions to achieve personal effectiveness in specific situations

These are the key EI leverage areas – the aspects of decision-making and strategic thinking that conventional IQ can readily exclude. These four components should be central concepts and training features of any EI model selected for organizational applications.

Today, more than ever, HR professionals are relied upon as strategic business partners whose expertise boosts the bottom line. Those developing an EI strategy to support their efforts now have more options and more powerful tools than ever before. New EI standards and practices are emerging, creating greater opportunity to meaningfully apply EI at work.

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