

Title: *Empirical Support for What We Think We Already Anecdotally Know? Linking Emotional Intelligence and Performance at Work.*, PsycCRITIQUES, 20060101, Vol. 51, Issue 12

Database: PsycCRITIQUES

Empirical Support for What We Think We Already Anecdotally Know? : *Linking Emotional Intelligence* and Performance at Work

Review By: Geoffrey Marczyk

Review of: *Linking Emotional Intelligence* and Performance at Work: Current Research Evidence With Individuals and Groups

By: Vanessa Urch Druskat; Fabio Sala; Gerald Mount, Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 2006. 292 pp. ISBN 0-8058-5074-0. \$34.50, paperback

Although a detailed discussion of the evolution of *emotional intelligence* is well beyond the scope of this review, a book like *Linking Emotional Intelligence and Performance at Work: Current Research Evidence With Individuals and Groups* can only be truly evaluated and understood after considering the theoretical and conceptual context that encouraged its writing. Numerous volumes have already been written detailing the history and current debate surrounding the construct referred to as *emotional intelligence*. The modern evolution of *emotional intelligence* can be traced back to the 1940s, when significant advances were being made in the conceptualization and measurement of traditional cognitive *intelligence*. Prominent researchers noted that *cognitive intelligence* was only part of the equation that predicted human performance, and they allowed for the impact of what were then referred to as nonintellective, affective, and conative abilities (see, e.g., Leeper, 1948; Wechsler, 1940).

This theme was picked up by other researchers who continued to focus on the importance of social and *emotional* competencies and their relationship to human performance, cognition, and well-being. Terms like *social competence* and *social intelligence* began to proliferate in the literature. Research in these areas set the stage for more modern and recognizable work in the area of *multiple intelligences* and, eventually, what we now refer to as *emotional intelligence* (see, e.g., Gardner, 1983; Goleman, 1995). This research as a whole was conducted by a variety of individuals from a wide range of disciplines such as psychology, sociology, anthropology, and education. Accordingly, each theoretical iteration took a unique approach to explaining and operationalizing its constructs. The result was an extensive body of valuable and related literature without a unifying theoretical construct.

This history and the resulting body of knowledge reflects on the current work in the field of *emotional intelligence* and suggests that there is currently little consensus among researchers and practitioners regarding the contours of the construct, how to best define it, or how to use it most effectively in applied settings. For example, some theorists define *emotional intelligence* as a set of interrelated *emotional* and social competencies that influence our ability to function effectively across a wide variety of contexts and circumstances (see, e.g., Bar-On, 2000). Other commentators and researchers advocate for ability-based models that are truer to traditional models of *intelligence* and assert that *emotional intelligence* is best described as the capacity to reason using feelings and the capacity of feelings to enhance thought (see, e.g., Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Others dislike the term *intelligence* altogether and prefer to refer to the construct as *emotional competence*. The end result of this compelling and lively exchange of ideas has led to a multitude of operational definitions and associated measurement strategies that make it difficult at best to reconcile the existing literature.

The preceding discussion focuses on the current debate regarding the conceptualization and application of *emotional intelligence* in general. Even though there is more debate than agreement, what is relatively clear is that a substantial amount of effort has gone into explaining, measuring, and researching the construct of *emotional intelligence*. In contrast, we know very little about how the construct impacts human functioning across a wide variety of situational contexts and functions. What has been written in this area is largely anecdotal and, unfortunately, tends to lack even the most minimal empirical basis for substantiating the relationship between *emotional intelligence* and human performance in workplace settings and functions. This background provides the perfect framework for understanding the contribution that this book makes to the body of knowledge in an area where we currently know relatively little—the relationship between *emotional intelligence* and performance in workplace settings.

[Overview of the Book](#)

This edited volume brings together a number of distinguished scholars and practitioners to explore the relationship between *emotional intelligence* and performance. The contributors hail from a variety of disciplines and settings that vary from pure academics and researchers to consultants and other types of practitioners. As such, this book is intended to cater to a wide audience of researchers, teachers, and practitioners. In the editors' own words, the overarching purpose of the book is to explore the questions of whether there is validity to the idea of a form of *intelligence* rooted in emotion and whether *emotional intelligence* really supports positive life outcomes such as work success. This overarching purpose is divided into two very specific objectives. The first objective is to provide the reader with a comprehensive summary of the latest research that explores various mechanisms through which *emotional intelligence* can affect the performance of individuals and groups. The second objective focuses on presenting a wide variety of theoretical, conceptual, and applied approaches to defining and studying *emotional intelligence* in workplace settings. Accordingly, the reader is exposed to a variety of operational definitions of *emotional intelligence* and a corresponding variety of research designs and methodologies.

The book is divided into three conceptually distinct but related sections that focus on the relationship between *emotional intelligence* and performance in workplace settings. The first section consists of six chapters dedicated to exploring the relationship between *emotional intelligence* and individual performance. Within these first six chapters the reader is exposed to many of the most popular and, relatively speaking, well-researched (e.g., competency- and ability-based) conceptual models of *emotional intelligence*. This is noteworthy because these models tend to be linked with the most psychometrically sound approaches for the measurement of *emotional intelligence* available to practitioners and researchers alike. Equal treatment is given to other important models that seem to approach the issue from a slightly different but related standpoint (e.g., mindfulness-based *emotional intelligence* from the clinical psychology tradition). Implications for assessment, training, coaching, and application in organizational settings are sprinkled throughout the chapters in this section.

The second section of the book consists of four chapters dedicated to exploring the relationship between *emotional intelligence* and group performance. As in the first section, the contributions in this section take an eclectic approach to defining and studying various components of *emotional intelligence* in team-based settings. The reader will find research exploring the impact of *emotional intelligence* in team-based settings from a variety of viewpoints and conceptual models. For example, one investigation focuses on the influence of individual *emotional intelligence* and *emotional* self-awareness on team effectiveness, whereas another considers a comprehensive, norm-based group capacity *emotional intelligence* theory. A refreshing counterpoint is offered in one investigation of social *intelligence*, which suggests that focusing too heavily on self-awareness at the expense

of information from the social context can have a negative impact on team performance.

The third and final section of the book consists of two chapters that focus on the future agenda for practitioners and researchers interested in the construct of *emotional intelligence*. Highlights of these chapters include a practitioner-oriented, concrete, and practical examination of how *emotional intelligence* can be used to enhance leadership and organizational performance. In addition, the final chapter of the book discusses the evolution of *emotional intelligence* to its present state, limitations of existing research, and the importance of ongoing investigations focusing on real-world applications and conceptual refinement.

Critique

The editors and contributors meet the two objectives articulated above, and the book has numerous strengths that are worth highlighting here. The book does indeed offer cutting edge empirical evidence for the relationship between *emotional intelligence* and individual and group work performance. In doing so, it adopts an evenhanded, multidisciplinary approach to defining, describing, and operationalizing the construct of *emotional intelligence*. It seems that the editors took great care in soliciting contributors with differing viewpoints and did not simply seek contributions from the most popular and well-researched perspectives. The variety of research methodologies used to explore the construct varies with these differing viewpoints, and the reader is exposed to a mix of qualitative and quantitative designs. One note of caution is appropriate here. This book is research intensive, and individuals without extensive training in research design and statistics might have difficulty following many of the methodologies used in the investigations. Even so, the editors and contributors include excellent summary sections that summarize the main implications and findings in a way that does not require extensive knowledge of research design or statistics. An additional and welcome feature is that the research is discussed in the context of appropriate limitations. As such, there is very little overreaching as is often found in more anecdotal works in this area. A discussion of future research directions and questions provides food for thought for those interested in continuing this line of work.

Ironically, the strengths of the book are also related to some minor shortcomings. The various approaches to defining and measuring *emotional intelligence* are welcome, but this diversity makes integration of the results difficult. In other words, common themes and findings across contributions are less than clear at times, and the reader is often left with the sense that each chapter is best understood in isolation. This lack of integration, in turn, makes it difficult to discuss application in anything but the most general terms. The book does attempt to focus on real-world application, predominantly in the form of human capital development. This too is a welcome contribution, but practitioners might be left wanting more guidance on the topic. As such, the main value of the book is the presentation of the research findings and their related theoretical underpinnings.

These minor limitations must be considered against the historical context of *emotional intelligence*. In other words, the diversity of conceptualization and the lack of practical integration directly mirrors our current state of knowledge in this area. We are still struggling to define the construct to everyone's satisfaction, and practical application is bound to suffer as a result. This is further confounded by a lack of intervention research focusing on *emotional intelligence* in general, let alone in organizational settings. Accordingly, my comments regarding limitations are meant to set appropriate expectations for future readers and not to indict the book itself. In sum, the strengths of this book are numerous and by far outweigh any minor limitations. This well-written and edited book should make a valuable contribution to the field.

References

Bar-On, R. (2000). *Emotional* and social *intelligence*: Insights from the *Emotional* Quotient Inventory (EQ-i). In R.Bar-On & J. D. A.Parker (Eds.), *Handbook of emotional intelligence* (pp. 363–388). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Gardner, H. (1983). *Frames of mind*. New York: Basic Books.

Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional intelligence*. New York: Bantam Books.

Leeper, R. W. (1948). A motivational theory of emotion to replace “emotion as disorganized response.” *Psychological Review*, 55, 5–21.

Mayer, J. D., & Salovey, P. (1997). What is *emotional intelligence*? In P.Salovey & D. J.Sluyter (Eds.), *Emotional development and emotional intelligence: Educational implications* (pp. 3–31). New York: Basic Books.

Wechsler, D. (1940). Nonintellective factors in general *intelligence*. *Psychological Bulletin*, 37, 444–445.

Source: PsycCRITIQUES. Vol.51 (12). 2006.

Accession Number: psq-2006-0003-1-1 **Digital Object Identifier:** 10.1037/a0001226