Umbrella Summary

Emotional Intelligence Tests

A Summary of Workforce Research Evidence Relevant to the Child Welfare Field

What are emotional intelligence tests?

In an employment context, emotional intelligence tests are tools that assess job candidates' or employees' abilities or tendencies related to recognizing, understanding, and managing emotions. Depending on the tool, they can be used to inform hiring decisions and/or for professional development. Beyond the general description above, there is variation in the definition and measurement of emotional intelligence, with the differences falling into three categories (Ashkanasy & Daus, 2005). When it was first conceived, emotional intelligence was considered to be a set of abilities or competencies, to be assessed through actual behavior (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Salovey, Mayer, Caruso, & Lopes, 2003). For example, the most prominent test of this nature, the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT), asks respondents to identify the emotions expressed in pictures of faces and conveyed by images of artwork; choose how they would maintain or change their feelings in various hypothetical scenarios; and indicate how to manage others' feelings to achieve certain results (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2004; Salovey et al., 2003). In this type of test, answers are considered more or less correct, and the response options are multiple choice or rating scales (e.g., how effective, how useful). As emotional intelligence gained popularity and new measures were developed, the focus shifted to self-report methods. In one category of tests, respondents provide self-appraisals of their emotion-related skills, using agreement scales (e.g., Schutte, Malouff, Hall, Haggerty, Cooper, & Golden, 1998). Example items include, "I am aware of my emotions as I experience them" (Schutte et al., 1998) and "I have good understanding of the emotions of people around me" (Law, Wong, & Song, 2004). Though the measurement method is very different than that used for ability tests, these assessments have nonetheless maintained alignment with the original conceptualization of emotional intelligence. In the third category of tests, self-report methods are also used, but the factors measured go beyond those originally defined as emotional intelligence and often overlap with other well-established personality factors (Joseph, Jin, Newman, & O'Boyle, 2015; van der Linden, Pekaar, & Bakker, Schermer, Vernon, Dunkel, & Petrides, 2017). The fractured nature of the research has hampered progress, prompted debate, and led to differences in employment-related practices. Though a few other ability-based emotional intelligence tests have emerged, the MSCEIT remains the most well-researched option of its kind; in contrast, there are many scholarly and commercial personality-based emotional intelligence tests available for use in personnel selection, though many argue that despite their labels, they are not actually measuring emotional intelligence.

Why are emotional intelligence tests valuable?

Emotional intelligence tests are valuable because they are predictive of a variety of important work outcomes across employment settings. When measured via self-report, emotional intelligence is a relatively strong predictor of job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intentions (Miao, Humphrey, & Qian, 2016). In addition, self-reported emotional intelligence is also moderately predictive of job performance (Joseph et al., 2015). In contrast, ability-based emotional intelligence is only mildly predictive of job satisfaction (Miao et al., 2016) and modestly predictive of job performance (Joseph & Newman, 2010). Regardless of how emotional intelligence is measured, its connections with job performance are significantly higher in jobs that require high emotional labor (i.e., deliberate management of emotional expression; Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993), such as service jobs.

QIC-WD Takeaways

▶ There is disagreement about how to best measure emotional intelligence.

▶ Emotional intelligence tests can be useful hiring tools that lead to better work attitudes and job performance among new hires; self-report measures are stronger predictors than ability-based measures.

▶ The connection between emotional intelligence and performance is stronger in jobs that require high emotional labor.

▶ Some emotional intelligence tests are predictive of turnover intentions, such that people who are higher in emotional intelligence are less likely to intend to voluntarily leave, but there are no meta-analyses examining the connection to actual turnover.

▶ Because they are associated with better performance, emotional intelligence tests may reduce involuntary turnover caused by poor performance, but research is needed to test that question.

▶ Due to the technical and legal requirements involved in validating an emotional intelligence test, it is recommended that agencies consult with an expert for assistance.

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