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Introduction to Current Empirical Research

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Current Empirical Research

Introduction to Current Empirical Research

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Academics and practitioners alike tend to agree that emotional intelligence (EI) is important in the workplace (and life in general), and most people believe they can spot an emotionally intelligent person when they see one. However, in this article, Seal, Sass, Bailey and Liao-Troth make the convincing case that there is nonetheless a substantial amount of disarray in the field of EI.

Despite its intuitive appeal, actually defining and measuring this concept has proven very difficult. Part of the problem is that EI (also known as Emotional Quotient [EQ]) is a concept under which many phenomena reside, including facial recognition, empathy, self-confidence, self-awareness, self-monitoring, social influence and relationship management, to provide an incomplete list. Anyone with more than a glancing knowledge of social psychology will note that each of these phenomena have been extensively developed and operationalized independently, so combining them under one substantial umbrella concept does seem risky.

The Seal *et al.*, article identifies and compares the two dominant approaches to conceptualizing EI, approaches they characterize as emotional ability and emotional competence. One approach is primarily interested in measuring EI through performance measures; the other is interested in measuring EI through self-perceptions. I'll leave it to Seal *et al.*, to demonstrate the distinctions; the question is, Are they measuring the same thing? Are they even swimming in the same conceptual and behavioral waters?

Academic dialog and comparison between the two approaches has been limited, often consisting of derogating the other's conception and defending one's own measures. The unique contribution of Seal *et al.*'s, article is that it is one of the first to directly compare the two approaches to each other in the same study and to assess the degree of their interaction and overlap. On this question, Seal *et al.*, show quite convincingly that the two approaches are not only talking past each other, they are largely measuring different things.

The spadework required to test and compare existing constructs is notoriously rare in organizational behavior research. This article should generate much interest and new research that will seek to further define and develop what researchers and practitioners agree is an ubiquitous and important, yet surprisingly elusive, characteristic of interpersonal behavior in organizations: our EI.