

Intelligence and Emotional Intelligence

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Intelligence (General Mental Ability) and Emotional Intelligence: Which one predict job performance better?

There have been wild claims that emotional intelligence predicts job performance better than intelligence. There is no scientific evidence to back that claim. Here is the science; holding other things constant General Mental Ability (intelligence/cognitive ability) explains 44% of the variation in job performance. Emotional intelligence on the other hand; ability-based emotional intelligence explains 5% of the variation in job performance, personality-based emotional intelligence explains 10% of the variation in job performance {source: Validity and utility of selection methods in personnel psychology: practical and theoretical implications of 100 years of research findings- Schmidt et al 2016}.

Proponents of emotional intelligence as the panacea to predicting the job performance have marketed this erroneous assertion so well that the generality of the population across the world believe this unsubstantiated claim. However, psychologists who have been doing and monitoring research in the area of employee selection know that this assertion is far from the truth. There is currently debate around whether there is such a construct called “emotional intelligence”. There is a general consensus in the psychological literature that emotional intelligence is not measuring a new or emerging psychological construct but long-established psychological traits. Most of what emotional intelligence instruments measure are well-known personality traits. Personality especially Conscientiousness explains 5% of the variation in performance across all jobs. If you add other personality factors in line with job requirements the predictive power is likely to be high. This may mean that if you measure personality as part of your selection process you are unlikely to miss identifying employees with problematic personality issues.

You can see that the contribution of emotional intelligence to job performance is there but the contribution is not close to what general mental ability contributes (44%). The question, therefore, is why companies are wasting so many resources investing in emotional intelligence tools when they make very little difference in predicting job performance. Companies are better off investing in the tools for selection based on their usefulness; what we call in psychology utility. In practice, it makes more sense to combine all the useful selection methods or criteria in order to get the best results. Based on their predictive power and in order of importance the following tools will be very useful when selecting employees; general mental ability tests, structured interviews, integrity tests, assessment centres, personality tests and situational judgment tests. Relying too much on one selection criteria will not give you the best results.

In making a choice on which tools to use it is important to match the selection tools to the roles for

which you are selecting people. While emotional intelligence explains less variation in performance than general mental ability, for certain roles you would need emotionally intelligent people. As an example, you would need your executives to have a certain level of emotional intelligence to function effectively. All your customer interfacing people need a certain level of emotional intelligence.

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