

# EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE: A PRACTICAL REVIEW OF MODELS, MEASURES, AND APPLICATIONS

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The concept of emotional intelligence (EQ) was introduced about 25 years ago, and over that time has evolved from a new scientific construct, to a popular fad, to a mainstay concept in leadership and team development. It is a unique concept in that it is both respected in the scientific community and understood by the general public. This article is focused on common practical questions about applying EQ in consulting psychology. First, it examines 3 of the most widely accepted models of EQ and compares and contrasts them. Next, it describes and evaluates the assessment tools used to measure each model. Finally, the article presents sample applications of EQ assessment in executive coaching and team development to demonstrate both the utility of EQ and ways to go about applying it in practice.

**Keywords:** emotional intelligence, MSCEIT, ECI, EQ-i

Once considered fluff by many psychologists and the latest “flavor of the month” by business leaders, the concept of emotional intelligence (EQ)<sup>1</sup> has demonstrated staying power. It started to attract scientific attention in 1989, when Peter Salovey and Jack Mayer began writing about it in their seminal article in the journal *Imagination, Cognition, and Personality* (Salovey & Mayer, 1989). Not long thereafter, the business community reacted with great interest to Daniel Goleman’s popular book *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More than IQ* (Goleman, 1995). Since then, EQ has been gaining increasing attention from consulting psychologists and from their clients. A recent search of APA’s PsycNET for publications referring to “emotional intelligence” “since 2000” yielded 11,183 hits.

A growing body of research has encouraged psychologists to take EQ seriously. Consider the following: For many years, Diana Durek worked for Multi-Health Systems (MHS), which publishes

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<sup>1</sup>Emotional intelligence is often abbreviated as EI or EQ. EI has the right initials. EQ has more power in the marketplace because it communicates something that clients intuitively understand, and emphasizes the contrast with IQ.



two of the most widely used measures of EQ. One of her duties was to present research results involving those instruments to various audiences, including APA's Division 14, the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, a group known for its devotion to scientific rigor. Diana told me,

I've seen a change recently. For years, Division 14 audiences challenged everything about EQ, from the concept itself to the way it's measured. These days they are much more interested in the results themselves. They seem to have come to accept the validity of the concept and our measures. (D. Durek, personal communication, 2008)

Likewise, in my early days of presenting EQ to business audiences, I found that it was necessary to spend time giving the business case. Skepticism was pervasive, and appropriately so for a new way of looking at things. These days, the business case needs relatively little attention. They want the tools that EQ provides.<sup>2</sup>

Business leaders have long had the sense that success involved something beyond understanding financials and the analysis of business factors. Yet they found describing and understanding that "something" to be elusive. The people side, the "soft side," doesn't come as naturally to many of them as the "hard side" of business.

Prior to Goleman's book, we were not that much help in building psychological understanding in the business community. Our track record in translating what we know into compelling and understandable language has been spotty at best. Our insistence on talking with business audiences in stilted, highly academic terms—as if we were talking to each other—leaves them vulnerable to poorly credentialed individuals who use poorly validated instruments but who can make those instruments sound appealing.

Goleman, though he gets criticized by some psychologists for lack of scientific rigor, wrote about EQ in ways that our clients could understand. That opened a door for us. We have the scientific rigor to back up his basic ideas. We also seem to have been more able to speak to our clients about EQ in plain language than we have been about other topics.

This article examines three major models of EQ. These models were selected because they are associated with widely used instruments, each of which has a technical manual that presents evidence of reliability and validity. Each of the three instruments has been reviewed by *Mental Measurements Yearbook*. In this article I will describe and then compare and contrast the models, as well as consider the pros and cons of their associated assessment tools. Finally, I will provide some ideas for applying EQ assessment in the development of individuals and teams, using three sample minicases.

To put this article in context, I should make it clear that I am a practitioner, not a researcher. It is not my intention to provide the kind of exhaustive literature search on this topic that a comprehensive scholarly treatment might provide. My goal is to tell the EQ story from a practitioner's point of view, drawing largely on the ways EQ theory, research, and assessment have been useful in my coaching and consulting work over the past 20 years. I want to provide readers with an overview of research-based EQ practice that may be useful to them as they consider their own choices about whether they want to use EQ in their work, and if so, how.

## EQ Definition and Models

David Caruso (2003) is a leading EQ thinker, test author, and practitioner. He had this to say about attempts to define EQ:

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<sup>2</sup> An exercise I've used is to ask a business audience to line up along a continuum from those happy to be in an EQ workshop to those who would call emotional intelligence an oxymoron. The goal is to hear from the doubters so that I can deal with their objections in real time. These days, it's harder and harder to get people to stand on the doubting side.



Just what is this thing called emotional intelligence (EI)? The answer, to a large extent, depends on who you ask. *EI has served as a sort of conceptual inkblot* [emphasis added], an unstructured notion that is open to a vast number of interpretations.

In other words, a number of people have taken their favorite ideas and called them EQ. So there are numerous definitions, models, and related assessment tools.

Today, three models dominate the EQ landscape: those developed by (1) Peter Salovey and Jack Mayer, and further refined in collaboration with David Caruso, (2) Daniel Goleman, and (3) Reuven Bar-On. Each defines EQ somewhat differently.

Just as the definition of cognitive intelligence has been a moving target for the past century, the definition of EQ has varied, depending on who defines it. Each definition has merit. It is premature and probably unnecessary to settle on a universally accepted definition at this point. Different ways of thinking about EQ lead to different lines of research and practice, all of which promote learning.

Here are the definitions offered by the three theories being reviewed:

1. According to [Salovey and Mayer \(1989–1990\)](#):

Emotional intelligence is the ability to perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth.

2. As summarized by [Wolff \(2005, p. 2\)](#), the Goleman model holds that:

Emotional intelligence is the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions effectively in ourselves and others. An emotional competence is a learned capacity based on emotional intelligence that contributes to effective performance at work.

3. [Bar-On \(1997\)](#) believes that:

Emotional Intelligence is an array of non-cognitive capabilities, competencies, and skills that influence one's ability to succeed in coping with environmental demands and pressures.

I have come to use the Bar-On model and assessment tool exclusively in my work. Still, I quibble with Bar-On's use of the word "non-cognitive." I believe that the essence of EQ is the integration of emotions with cognition to impact performance. Emotion without logic can be disastrous. But logic without emotion has no meaning, since meaning arises out of what matters ([Damasio, 1994](#)). What matters is, by definition, based on emotion.

After a decade or more of struggling to find my own words to use with clients, I saw that they'd been there all the time: EQ is the intelligent use of emotions. Each major EQ model describes this integration. Each also shares the belief that people with high EQ use various skills or abilities to manage their own emotions and to influence the emotions of others. A transformational leader, for example, might work to put him- or herself into an emotional state of enthusiasm when communicating a vision of the organization that will inspire others. John Kennedy was a master. Asking Americans what they could do for their country was inspiring. Howard Dean, once a front-runner in the race to be the Democratic nominee for President, missed the mark the night he yelled "Yeehaaah!" in an attempt to encourage supporters who were disappointed after he came in third in the Iowa primary. This display of unregulated emotion, replayed relentlessly by the media, was damaging. His campaign crashed in that very moment.

How do people become good at the integration of logic and emotion? [Salovey and Mayer \(1989–1990\)](#) argue that the ability to learn EQ skills arises out of an inborn form of intelligence. They maintain that just as IQ predicts one's ability to learn cognitive material, EQ predicts one's ability to learn emotional skills. Their model is referred to as an *ability model*.

[Goleman \(1995, 1998\)](#) and [Bar-On \(1997\)](#) argue that EQ is a set of skills that are learnable. In the research literature, their models are referred to as *trait models*.

Each position has value, identifying key elements to be considered, but perhaps none tells the whole story. It is important to know what each model purports, because it gives you an idea of what you will get when you measure EQ using each model's assessment tool.



## Exploring the Three Models

### Salovey, Mayer, and Caruso

Peter Salovey, now the president of Yale University, and Jack Mayer, a professor at the University of New Hampshire, are academically based research psychologists with impeccable credentials who have earned a great deal of professional respect. David Caruso joined their research on EQ while he was a student of Salovey's at Yale. [Salovey and Mayer \(1989–1990\)](#) are usually credited with coining the term *emotional intelligence*, although the term was used and the concept explored before that by Wayne [Payne \(1985\)](#) in his doctoral dissertation.

Salovey and Mayer see EQ as a form of innate intelligence, a largely inborn set of abilities that impact the ways in which people manage their own emotions and understand and influence emotions in others. Although they believe that people can improve their EQ skills, they believe that the extent to which they can do so is limited by the amount of ability to learn EQ that they were born with.

They identify four branches within their overall concept of EQ ([Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2002](#)). These branches describe the way people recognize and manage their own emotions and the way people may attempt to influence the emotions of others.

1. The perceiving emotions branch involves the ability to identify emotions in ourselves, others, and as represented by objects, such as pictures, as well as the ability to express emotions accurately.
2. The emotional facilitation of thought branch involves the use of emotions to prioritize thought and utilizes feelings as aids to judgment. Changes in mood lead to changes in perspective.
3. The understanding and analyzing emotions branch involves the accurate labeling of emotions, understanding emotions and relationships, understanding complex feelings, and understanding transitions between emotions.
4. The reflective regulation of emotion branch involves the ability to stay open to feelings, reflectively engaging and detaching from feelings as appropriate, and managing emotions in oneself and attempting to influence them in others.

A simple illustration of how these four branches relate to the intelligent use of emotions could be as follows: You and a colleague are planning a high-stakes business presentation.

- Branch 1: You recognize that you are feeling excited but notice that your colleague seems to feel hesitant. You express your excitement by commenting energetically on possible ways to do the presentation.
- Branch 2: Your excitement leads you to think about the parts of the presentation that you look forward to and the impact you anticipate that it will have. It is also helping you to anticipate what you need to prepare. Your friend's hesitation is leading her to think about what could go wrong and her general fear of failure. Her perspective is different from yours.
- Branch 3: You tell your friend that you are excited about the presentation. Part of your excitement is based on your relationship with your colleague, someone with whom you enjoy working. As you think about her hesitation, you begin to feel a little apprehensive that she may back out or underperform. You recognize that your apprehension is leading you to be a little less excited about doing the presentation.
- Branch 4: While you enjoy your excitement, you recognize that as you show more excitement, your colleague expresses more hesitation. You rein in your excitement to a lower level so that you can listen more closely to your colleague's concerns. Your tuning in to what she is saying helps your colleague to feel heard, which helps her to become less apprehensive and more oriented to solve the problems that she's concerned about.

### Goleman

Daniel Goleman is a Harvard-trained psychologist who studied under David McClelland and spent much of his career as a journalist for *The New York Times* writing on the brain and behavioral



sciences. He is an unusual psychologist in that he is able to write about psychology in ways that those outside of our profession can understand. Outside of psychology, most people probably think that Goleman developed the concept of EQ, because of the success of his books.

Goleman is not an academic researcher. The model he developed was not based on his own basic research. He scoured existing psychological research, as well as data from other fields, including business and education. Thus, he didn't go through the kind of theory development and testing that characterizes traditional scientific research. (Sigmund Freud did not do much basic research either, and yet his work has had an enormous impact on the evolution of psychology.) The fact that Goleman went beyond psychology to include strands of experience from a wide range of fields enriches and humanizes what he brings.

But his scientific method can be criticized as weak. His model may be more vulnerable to the impact of bias than models derived from traditional science. It can be criticized as having the potential to cherry-pick information, without having to deal with inconvenient findings.

Still, if it weren't for Goleman, we probably wouldn't be talking about EQ, because we would have no market (a reminder that the field of psychology functions in a complex system, the components of which constantly impact each other). Fortunately, he started with a foundation of solid training in psychology. Then he added in an integrative way of thinking that melded information from a wide variety of sources.

Goleman originally identified 25 emotional competencies. Over time, he reduced his model to 18 competencies, sorted into four clusters. There is a fair amount of overlap with concepts developed by Salovey, Mayer, and Caruso. That's not surprising, because Goleman used their early research to guide his own thinking in part (Goleman, 1995, p. 43). Goleman's model, as described by Wolff (2005), defines his four clusters as follows:

1. Self-awareness concerns knowing one's internal states, preferences, resources, and intuitions. The self-awareness cluster contains three competencies: emotional awareness (recognizing one's emotions and their effects), accurate self-assessment (knowing one's strengths and limits), and self-confidence (a strong sense of one's self-worth and capabilities).
2. Self-management refers to managing one's internal states, impulses, and resources. The self-management cluster contains six competencies: emotional self-control (keeping disruptive emotions and impulses in check), transparency (maintaining integrity, acting congruently with one's values), adaptability (flexibility in handling change), achievement (striving to improve or meeting a standard of excellence), initiative (readiness to act on opportunities), and optimism (persistence in pursuing goals despite obstacles and setbacks).
3. Social awareness refers to how people handle relationships and awareness of others' feelings, needs, and concerns. The social-awareness cluster contains three competencies: empathy (sensing others' feelings and perspectives and taking an active interest in their concerns), organizational awareness (reading a group's emotional currents and power relationships), and service orientation (anticipating, recognizing, and meeting customers' needs).
4. Relationship management concerns the skill or adeptness at inducing desirable responses in others. The relationship-management cluster contains six competencies: developing others (sensing others' development needs and bolstering their abilities), inspirational leadership (inspiring and guiding individuals and groups), change catalyst (initiating or managing change), influence (wielding effective tactics for persuasion), conflict management (negotiating and resolving disagreements), and teamwork and collaboration (working with others toward shared goals, creating group synergy in pursuing collective goals).

## Bar-On

Reuven Bar-On is a research psychologist who has held a number of academic appointments. One day in 1980, while he was walking around his campus, he thought about his fellow faculty members. He realized that although his colleagues were all highly intelligent people, only some of them were



highly successful. This insight led to a beautifully simple question: “Success must be based on more than intelligence. What else is needed?”

This question led him on a 17-year research exploration that identified a list of 15 emotional skills that research suggested were associated with success beyond what IQ alone predicted. Like Salovey, Mayer, and Caruso, Bar-On based his model on his own rigorous research. Unlike them, Bar-On sees the factors he identified as skills that can be learned and improved.

His model was updated by MHS in 2011. The refined model has 16 skills grouped into five composites, which, again, have some alignment with the other two models. The five broad composites in Bar-On’s model, and their definitions, are as follows:

1. Self-perception is comprised of self-regard (respecting oneself, confidence), self-actualization (pursuit of meaning, self-improvement), and emotional self-awareness (understanding one’s own emotions).
2. Self-expression is comprised of emotional expression (constructive expression of emotions), assertiveness (communicating feelings and beliefs, nonoffensive), and independence (self-directed, free from emotional dependency).
3. Interpersonal is comprised of interpersonal relationships (mutually satisfying relationships), empathy (understanding, appreciating how others feel), and social responsibility (social consciousness, helpful).
4. Decision making is comprised of problem solving (find solutions when emotions are involved), reality testing (objective, see things as they really are), and impulse control (resist or delay impulse to act).
5. Stress management is comprised of flexibility (adapting emotions, thoughts, and behaviors), stress tolerance (coping with stressful situations), and optimism (positive attitude and outlook on life).

In thinking about the similarities and differences among these models, I believe that understanding EQ may be somewhat like understanding brain anatomy. What you see when you dissect the brain depends upon where you make your cuts. Each model has value but none seems to have the whole picture. The starting point for each theoretician, where they made their metaphorical cuts, was different. Salovey and Mayer were initially interested in expanding our understanding of intelligence. Goleman focused on bridging the gap between psychology and work, which led him to focus on factors that spoke to that question. Bar-On wanted to go beyond traditional thoughts about IQ to see what additional factors account for success, the question that focused his research. Regardless of which model one favors, it seems clear that some interplay between native ability and learning is involved in a full understanding of EQ.

### Assessment Tools

Examining the process of test development, reliability, and validity for each of these EQ assessment instruments reminds us of just how hard it is to build a good psychometric tool.

My journey in EQ assessment began in 1999. The Society of Psychologists in Management (SPIM) presented a workshop on measuring EQ. Two Air Force psychologists, Major George Munkachy, PhD, and Captain Keith White, PhD, reviewed the then-current state of development of EQ measures. The Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT)—the Salovey, Mayer, Caruso instrument—would not be published until 2002, although research versions were available in 1999. The original Emotional Competency Inventory (ECI), based on Goleman’s work, and Bar-On’s measure, the Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i), had been published about two years earlier.

The ECI, based on a model built in a more ad hoc manner, had little empirical support. The Air Force psychologists presented evidence at the time that suggested that the EQ-i had superior psychometric properties to the ECI. Review of the test manuals for each instrument led me to the same conclusion. Bar-On used a strongly scientific approach to building his instrument, which is reflected by the supporting research cited in its manual. As a result, I began using the EQ-i in my consultation work.



Published in 2002, the MSCEIT demonstrates a pedigree similar to that of the EQ-i with regard to careful construction of an underlying theory, as well as significant amounts of peer-reviewed research to assess both the theory and the reliability and validity of the instrument itself.

The ECI and the EQ-i have each been updated, in 2005 and 2011, respectively. Review of the technical manual for the ECI 2.0 (Wolff, 2005) suggests that the science behind this instrument remains weaker than that behind the other two instruments. There are far fewer studies to support validity and reliability than there are for the EQ-i or the MSCEIT.

These conclusions are supported by reviews found in the *Mental Measurements Yearbook* (<http://buros.org/mental-measurements-yearbook>):

## MSCEIT

The test developers have produced a measure of EQ that offers promise for both theoretical and applied work. The MSCEIT is noteworthy for its theoretical basis and use of performance tasks. Additional reliability estimates and study of related constructs and predictive criteria should deepen the theory on EQ and strengthen evidence regarding the MSCEIT's validity. (Spies & Plake, 2005)

Note that the above review was done shortly after the instrument was published and significant amounts of research have been done since.

## ECI

The ECI may be a reliable instrument. Currently, little empirical evidence has been offered to support this property. Validity, too, is questionable, given the many limiting factors of the studies reported in the test manual. These criticisms were acknowledged by the authors and were purportedly addressed by a revision of the ECI (i.e., the ECI 2.0). The inventory certainly shows promise, but much more work needs to be completed to establish its psychometric properties as well as its applicability to a wider range of job professions. (Geisinger, Spies, Carlson, & Plake, 2007)

## EQ-i

The EQ-i 2.0 user's guide is impressive in its coverage of conceptual, practical (administration, scoring, interpretation, application to intervention), and technical aspects of the EQ-i 2.0. Equally impressive are the development efforts, pilot and standardization samples, and aspects of the psychometric evidence (e.g., reliability, scale structure, convergent validity, and expected differences between groups). Some questions remain, however, regarding structural validity evidence for the overall model that guided the development of the scale. In addition, data from predictive validity studies linking scores and recommended interventions (e.g., coaching) to outcomes are needed to strengthen support for the use of this inventory as a professional and personal development tool. (Carlson, Geisinger, & Jonson, 2014)

With these reviews in mind, let's look at each instrument and the way it measures what it perceives to be EQ.

## MSCEIT

Based on the belief that EQ is an inborn intelligence or ability, the MSCEIT attempts to measure one's capacity for learning EQ skills, much as an IQ test measures one's ability to learn cognitive material. If you've ever given a standard IQ test, such as the Wechsler or Stanford-Binet, you've had a glimpse at the MSCEIT. It asks respondents to solve eight kinds of problems, two for each of its four branches of EQ. (Examples that follow are not actual MSCEIT items but are taken from a MSCEIT certification workshop offered by MHS in 2002.)

**Perception and expression of emotion.** To measure one's ability to identify and express emotions, respondents are shown pictures of faces and asked to identify the emotion each face is expressing, as well as pictures of paintings, plants, and so on, and asked to identify the feeling the picture expresses.

**Emotional facilitation of thought.** To measure one's ability to understand how emotions impact thought, respondents are asked to identify the most useful emotion in a particular situation,



such as meeting one's future in-laws for the first time. They are also asked to identify how closely an emotion experienced in a situation, such as surprise over an unexpected birthday present, is like a sensation, for example, cold, blue, or sweet.

**Understanding and analyzing emotions.** To measure one's ability to comprehend and analyze emotions, respondents are asked to read a description of a situation that includes facts and emotions and then to identify subsequent emotions that would be the most adaptive in that situation. They are also asked to identify the component emotions that comprise complex emotions.

**Reflective regulation of emotions.** To measure one's ability to regulate emotions, respondents are asked to rate the effectiveness of various actions one could take to preserve or change one's emotion that has been described as arising within a particular situation. They are also asked to rate the effectiveness of actions to influence someone else's emotions in situations described in the test items.

Like standard IQ tests, the MSCEIT has right and wrong answers. Remember that Salovey, Mayer, and Caruso's model argues that EQ is a form of intelligence. Therefore, it is appropriate to test EQ in this manner. The challenge is determining whether or not the answers are truly "right." For example, there can be legitimate differences of opinion with regard to which are the best emotional strategies within challenging situations. Also, how does one know the "right emotional response" to a picture? Art elicits different emotional reactions from different people.

Salovey, Mayer, and Caruso were sensitive to this issue. Their solution was to use two methods to establish the best answers. One was to give the MSCEIT items to a sample of the general population to identify the consensus opinion. The challenge with this method is that it basically says that the way most people react is the "right" way.

Comments from Maul (2012) are also worth noting:

However, available research in emotions supports the idea that emotions are not defined solely by their consensual use and interpretation. In particular, facial displays of emotion appear to be largely biological in origin and culturally universal (e.g., Ekman & Friesen, 1978), as do many other aspects of the experience and functioning of emotions. . . . Moreover, the concept of intelligence [and Mayer & Salovey's, 1997, definition of EI, as discussed above] involves more than knowledge, and most matters of differences in intelligence are not matters of consensus. (p. 397)

The other method to determine the "right answers" was to provide the items to 21 experts in the field of emotions. Interestingly, it turns out that there is a 90% overlap in the consensus of the population and the consensus of experts. My concern with this approach is that, having known many experts in the field of emotions, I haven't been impressed that their EQ is exceptional. As Maul (2012) said, "Although this group is likely to have had more formal knowledge of emotional theories and research than the general public, the connection between formal knowledge of emotions and emotional intelligence is not necessarily clear" (p. 398).

Finally, with regard to using the MSCEIT, or any test, it is essential to consider your purpose in doing an assessment. Remember that the MSCEIT is designed to measure inborn skill, which can be defined as the ability to learn EQ skills, just as IQ measures the ability to learn various cognitive skills. Jack Mayer explained it to me this way: "The MSCEIT is like an IQ test, predicting how well someone can learn. The EQ-i is like the SAT, measuring what someone has learned" (personal communication, 2002).

If you want to assess a person's capacity for improving his or her EQ skills, to decide, for example, whether coaching would make sense, the MSCEIT might be the instrument of choice. In addition, the test authors, in their MSCEIT certification program, talk about how one can use the instrument in coaching. For a thorough review of recent research on the MSCEIT, see Brackett, Rivers, and Salovey (2011).

## ECI 2.0

As stated in its technical manual (Wolff, 2005):

The *ECI* is a 360-degree tool designed to assess the emotional competencies of individuals and organizations. It is based on emotional competencies identified by Dr. Daniel Goleman in *Working with*



*Emotional Intelligence* (1998), and on competencies from Hay/McBer's *Generic Competency Dictionary* (1996) as well as Dr. Richard Boyatzis's *Self-Assessment Questionnaire* (SAQ).

Using a 360 approach is intended to overcome the potential difficulties found with self-report instruments—that is, whether people with limited self-awareness can accurately assess their own EQ. The ECI takes the position that input from others is essential to get an accurate measure.

The ECI seeks to measure emotional competencies that differentiate performance. Competencies, according to [Spencer and Spencer \(1993\)](#), “are underlying characteristics of people and indicate ways of behaving or thinking, generalizing across situations, and enduring for a reasonably long period of time” (p. 3).

It appears from this definition that competencies may be either inborn or learned. In other writings, both Goleman and Boyatzis speak to EQ development, so to at least some extent, the ECI seeks to measure things that can be learned or improved.

The ECI measures 18 competencies organized into the four clusters mentioned in the description of Goleman's model above.

### **EQ-i 2.0 and the EQ 360 2.0**

The original EQ-i was published in 1997. Its revision, the EQ-i 2.0, was published in 2011.<sup>3</sup> The revised EQ-i can be administered as a self-report instrument or as a full 360 assessment. These instruments measure 15 EQ skills, separated into five composites, plus a measure of well-being, which does not contribute to the total EQ score. The skills, and their composites, are those listed above in the description of the revised model.

## **A Comparison of Validity**

Another way to understand the similarities and differences among the MSCEIT, ECI 2.0, and EQ-i 2.0, is through a comparison of their psychometric properties. Psychometrics can be considered from two perspectives: internal properties, such as the reliability and factor structure of scales, and external properties, such as relationships with other variables. The respective test manuals provide detailed analyses concerning internal properties, and all three tools generally meet professional guidelines. Therefore, this review is focused on the external properties.

Relationships with other measures fall under the general heading of validity. Of particular interest in evaluating a measure, and especially in comparing multiple measures of the same construct, are construct validity (correlations with similar measures) and criterion-related validity (correlations with performance).

### **Construct Validity (Convergent and Divergent)**

As discussed above, the MSCEIT differs in a fundamental way from the ECI 2.0 and EQ-i 2.0 because it is based on an ability model of EQ. It defines the construct as a cognitive skill set for detecting and reasoning with emotional information. The ECI 2.0 and EQ-i 2.0 are trait models that put greater emphasis on dispositions having to do with self-management and interpersonal relations ([Conte, 2005](#)). Unsurprisingly, meta-analyses show measures based on trait models like the ECI 2.0 and EQ-i 2.0 to be highly correlated with each other, with estimates ranging from .50 ([Gowing, 2001](#)) to .71 ([Van Rooy, Viswesvaran, & Pluta, 2005](#)). However, the ability-based MSCEIT is much less related to trait measures, with published correlations with the EQ-i 2.0 ranging from .21 ([Brackett & Mayer, 2003](#)) to .36 ([Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 2000](#)). For the most part, the ECI 2.0

<sup>3</sup>For a summary of the differences between the first and second editions, see <https://tap.mhs.com/Portals/0/Model%20Evolution%20Flyer-web.pdf> Also, for a recent review of the history of EQ that contains a review of research on EQ, the MSCEIT, the EQ-i 2.0, and the ECI, see [Stein and Deonarine \(2015\)](#).



and EQ-i 2.0 are measuring a similar construct, which is largely distinct from what the MSCEIT measures.

Research on the relationship between the different measures of EQ and more traditional measures of individual differences, such as general mental ability (or IQ) and personality, also show different patterns for the MSCEIT than for the ECI 2.0 and EQ-i 2.0. The MSCEIT is more highly correlated with mental ability than the trait-based measures of EQ, ranging from .31 versus .13 (Van Rooy et al., 2005) to .25 versus .11 (Joseph & Newman, 2010). The correlations for the MSCEIT are large enough to suggest that it does measure a cognitive skill set, and yet small enough to indicate that it is capturing elements that are distinct from traditional conceptions of mental ability as reflected in IQ test scores (divergent validity).

The trait measures are more highly correlated with the Big Five personality factors, with average correlations across the five factors around .40 versus .20 (Joseph & Newman, 2010). The ECI 2.0 is most highly correlated with Extraversion, Conscientiousness, and Openness (Wolff, 2005), whereas the EQ-i 2.0 is most highly correlated with Extraversion, Conscientiousness, and Emotional Stability (Brackett & Mayer, 2003). So the major difference in the two trait-based measures is that the ECI 2.0 reflects more openness, whereas the EQ-i 2.0 reflects greater emotional stability.

In their early days, trait measures of EQ were dismissed as nothing more than measures of personality by a different name. These correlations are large enough in size to suggest that personality does play a role in EQ skill development. However, they are small enough to suggest that these trait measures are capturing previously unmeasured variance (divergent validity). That makes sense. Personality is relatively stable, whereas the ECI 2.0 and EQ-i 2.0 attempt to measure skills that people can learn and improve. It would be reasonable to believe that certain personality traits would make it easier to learn EQ skills than others, perhaps accounting for the correlations that have been found. Other nonpersonality factors would also contribute to whether someone learns EQ skills, such as opportunity, motivation, role models, and vocational demands.

The MSCEIT seems to be measuring a largely cognitive construct that is minimally related to personality, whereas the ECI 2.0 and EQ-i 2.0 seem to be measuring a largely nonintellectual construct that overlaps to some degree with personality. The largest difference between the ECI 2.0 and EQ-i 2.0 is that the former reflects greater Flexibility and Curiosity, whereas the latter reflects greater control over Emotions.

At the end of the day, asking whether EQ is trait or ability may be the wrong question. Cognitive and dispositional elements are both essential elements of EQ. Perhaps as the concept continues to mature, we will more completely understand the value each element contributes.

### Criterion-Related Validity

Several studies have looked at the relationship between different measures of EQ and ratings of job performance. Which measures, if any, are likely to predict job performance? This question is at the core of whether you decide to include some version of EQ in your assessment, coaching, and consulting tool kits, and if so, which version.

A consistent finding is that measures based on trait models tend to be more highly related to performance than ability models—for example, .47 versus .18 in one meta-analysis (Joseph & Newman, 2010) and .28 versus .24 in another (O'Boyle, Humphrey, Pollack, Hawver, & Story, 2011). A meta-analysis of EQ and transformational leadership styles followed the same trend, reporting stronger correlations for trait-based measures compared with ability-based measures. Specifically, the correlations with coworker ratings of transformational leadership, corrected for unreliability, were .20 versus .05 for the EQ-i 2.0 and MSCEIT, respectively (Harms & Crede, 2010).

However, the consistently stronger correlations for trait models should be interpreted in light of the overlap these measures have with existing variables, such as the Big Five. Studies that consider how different measures of EQ add incremental validity above and beyond the Big Five and cognitive ability help to determine whether the trait models are simply a repackaging of existing personality constructs or if ability models merely tap into a sliver of general mental ability.

Two meta-analyses indicated that only the trait models add incremental validity in predicting job performance over both the Big Five and cognitive ability (Joseph & Newman, 2010; O'Boyle



et al., 2011). For example, Joseph and Newman (2010) reported increases in the percentage of performance variance accounted for of 14.2% for trait measures but only a nonsignificant .7% for ability measures. The researchers concluded that the unique variance in trait-based measures of EQ is due to their “inclusion of surplus motivational constructs and other sundry content that might be performance related” (Joseph & Newman, 2010, p. 67).

### Summary of Validity

Taken together, psychometric research on EQ and performance warrants three conclusions. First, the MSCEIT measures a cognitive ability that adds little above general mental ability and personality to the prediction of performance (though, given what the construct measures, it may be one factor in predicting who will be a successful EQ coaching client). Second, the ECI 2.0 and EQ-i 2.0 both measure a combination of personality and other traits that do contribute uniquely to the prediction of performance. Third, the EQ-i 2.0 is represented with much greater frequency than the ECI 2.0 in the preceding meta-analyses. In fact, the transformational leadership meta-analysis did not include studies using the ECI 2.0. Therefore, the incremental validity of the ECI 2.0 remains an open question and an opportunity for future research to further clarify distinctions among trait-based measures of EQ.

### Realistic Claims

The research shows that EQ does indeed contribute to predicting job performance and leadership effectiveness. However, the empirical results temper some of the more sensational claims in the popular literature, such as the claim that EQ is two times more important to performance than IQ or the claim that EQ explains 85% of high performance. At best, the meta-analyses show that some trait measures of EQ may correlate with performance near .50. Meta-analyses also show that IQ, or general mental ability, correlates with performance in the range of .50 (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998). The research is clear that EQ is important, but it is also clear that we should not undermine its importance by overstating the case with exaggerated claims. The actual results speak for themselves.

From a marketing perspective, making exaggerated claims that do not stand up to reality may be short-term smart but long-term foolish. It is an approach that could lead the marketplace to reject EQ eventually, and, as a result, the value that it actually brings will be lost as well. We would just have to reinvent it using different language.

Obviously, both intellectual and emotional skills help people perform more effectively. That's all the literature is saying. But what might be worth considering is the differential amount of attention that society pays to developing intellectual skills versus emotional skills. We have invested the vast majority of our educational efforts, starting in preschool, in building intellectual skills. I often ask business audiences how many of them took courses in English, biology, and algebra. Every hand goes up. Then I ask how many took courses in empathy. No hand goes up. Therefore, we are likely to be able to achieve significant gains in performance by increasing the amount of attention paid to building emotional skills.

### Using EQ in Coaching

The goal of providing information on EQ theory and measurement is to make it easier for readers to make informed decisions about how to apply EQ in their work, should they choose to do so. My choice has been, for the most part, to use the Bar-On model and the various EQ tools associated with it. They are most closely aligned with my purposes (largely coaching and leadership-team development), and they have good, though inescapably flawed, science behind them, just as all high-quality psychometric instruments have.

Let's look at a few applications from my work. To put them in context, I left that 1999 SPIM conference on EQ measurement excited about the EQ-i. I began to talk with clients about it: “You can take it and find out what you're good at and what you're not so good at,” I told them. “Great!” they said. “Then what?” “Hmmm,” I replied. I hadn't gotten that far yet.



For coaching purposes, the goal is not assessment. Ultimately, the goal is sustainable behavior change. Fortunately, psychologists are experts at creating conditions within which clients can achieve sustainable behavior change.

After Goleman's first book on EQ (Goleman, 1995), the business community was besieged by consultants offering EQ workshops. Unfortunately, workshops alone rarely achieve the kind of long-term change business clients thought they were buying. Workshops are good at delivering cognitive content, as well as opening eyes, minds, and hearts. But they cannot provide all the factors that most people need to achieve the kinds of growth that building EQ skills involves.

As a result of overreliance on workshops, EQ in the late 1990s was in severe danger of being labeled a "flavor of the month." In response, an article by Cherniss, Goleman, Emmerling, Cowan, and Adler (1998) identified 22 principles of good practice for developing EQ, based on what psychological science has learned is required for sustainable behavior change.

I use their principles to guide the work I do with clients (Ackley, 2006). My approach includes careful negotiation with decision-makers about what is needed for success in an EQ program. Elements we agree to usually include:

- a workshop (to get started);
- an EQ assessment that includes the EQ-i or the EQ 360, as well as a detailed interview;
- feedback, consisting of the computer-generated reports associated with those instruments, and often an individually prepared report that integrates test results, interview data, and other information that may be available;
- an individual debrief meeting that includes development planning;
- individual and (sometimes) group coaching that includes exercises for the development of those EQ skills identified by the assessment as the best targets for development; and
- periodic meetings among client, client manager, and coach to review progress and align ongoing goals.

It was, and is, essential that we provide EQ-development processes that create significant and sustainable behavior change. As psychologists, with deep expertise in behavior and its change, we know how to do so. The applications that follow were designed with these issues in mind.

### **Application 1: Individual Coaching Using the Bar-On Model and Measure**

I had been asked to help prepare seven high-potential senior leaders in a high-performance health-care organization (Baldrige Award winner) for the chief operating officer and chief executive officer slots. One of these senior leaders was a fast-rising, highly competent, extremely intelligent executive. We conducted an EQ 360 assessment and an EQ interview (Ackley, 2006). During our feedback meeting, she said, "Dana, I'm great at getting things done. But I leave a lot of dead bodies. I'd like to learn how to work with people so that they want to work with me the next time."

Review of her EQ 360 showed that she was relatively low on Empathy and Impulse Control. We worked together over the next year in twice-monthly coaching meetings, as well as monthly group coaching meetings with her peers who were also participating in our program. We worked on exercises regarding those two EQ skills (Ackley, 2006), providing her ways to engage in daily practice designed to help her improve in those areas.

For example, to help her develop her skills in Empathy, I asked her to keep a daily log of key encounters she had with people. Her task was to note the extent to which she was actually listening and processing what she was hearing versus rehearsing what she planned to say while the other person was speaking. It was an eye opening-experience for her.

Next I asked her to review her calendar at the start of each day in order to pick out one or two high-stakes encounters she would have. In those encounters, she was to practice reading the other person's emotional cues and engage in active listening, skills we worked on in a role-modeling and role-playing exercise. Focusing on selected key encounters made the task realistic and generated benefits where they mattered most. No one can practice a new skill in every encounter.

The results that she got from changing the way she approached these important interactions increased her motivation to be more empathic. She was surprised to find that it actually saved her



time in the long run, because others were much more responsive to her ideas. She had more cooperation from others and encountered less passive resistance.

She also learned to slow herself down in order to listen to and understand others more effectively. Then she could integrate what she wanted with what they wanted. Doing so almost automatically helped her build greater Impulse Control. Finally, she discovered that she had been good at talent selection, which meant that those she led often had great ideas. She no longer felt that she had to think of everything herself.

A key point of this illustration is that coaching sessions, in and of themselves, are not enough to build EQ skills. We must provide structured ways in which clients can practice their skills in their real world of work (Hicks & Person, 1999).

EQ coaching doesn't have to focus just on EQ. EQ, like a number of other approaches, is often a gateway to discussing all sorts of relevant issues, including ethics, personal assumptions that drive behavior, group dynamics, relationship dynamics, company politics, organizational culture, how brain anatomy impacts function, and many other issues.

For instance, in addition to our straightforward focus on EQ skills, we explored this client's personal life, both past and current. Family-of-origin issues had shaped her approach to her work as a leader, as seems to happen most of the time. We did not do therapy. That is, we did not rework emotional issues. But her increased self-insight, created by linking her past to her current behavior, took the magic out of the past. She was no longer blindly controlled by assumptions that had been learned a long time ago about how the world works, because she now understood them. She could take that learning to work with her.

## Application 2: Individual Coaching Using the Salovey, Mayer, and Caruso Model

Salovey, Mayer, and Caruso's four-branch model can provide a great structure for coaching. A senior executive in a Fortune 500 company was talking with me about a presentation he was going to make. He was a bit nervous about it. As is often the case with such high achievers, his anxiety had led him to focus intently on his PowerPoint deck. In his organization, a premium is put on deck preparation, usually leading, unfortunately, to mind-numbing complexity.

I asked him how he wanted his audience to feel when he finished. "I haven't thought about it," he admitted. I noted that it would be their feelings at the end of his presentation that would largely guide what they did with the information he had shared. And he had some very clear ideas about what he wanted his audience to do. He needed them to engage in some challenging work that would require a great deal of effort. Further, most of the people in the audience were not in his reporting chain. He didn't have the luxury of relying on his formal authority.

I walked him through the four branches of the Salovey, Mayer, and Caruso model:

1. "What are people likely to be feeling when you begin?" He didn't know, but now was alerted to pay attention to the signals, such as body language, facial expressions, and any comments he might overhear. It turned out that his presentation was at the end of a long day of presentations. Boredom and fatigue were very likely to be dominant emotions.
2. "What are their feelings likely to lead them to be thinking about?" The answer was that they probably would not be thinking about what he wanted them to be thinking about. Instead, they may well be thinking about going home to dinner, the work that had piled up on their desks during this day of presentations, or any other topics that bored/fatigued minds wander to.
3. "What might be leading them to have certain emotions?" This question, which Salovey, Mayer, and Caruso call *the insight question*, led him to consider the context within which he was presenting, something he had not considered. Again, his audience was going to have been in the same meeting all day. He began to think about which presenters would have preceded him in the speaking order. Would they have been boring, dispiriting, enlivening? What?
4. "Now, what do you *want* them to feel, and how can you influence them to feel that way?" This is the payoff question. What did he want to be true about his audience's emotional state when he finished, because that, largely, was going to determine how they responded to his



requests. The answer, once he thought about it, was pretty simple. He wanted them to be excited about the potential outcomes of the work he was asking them to do.

As a result of our discussion, he adapted his presentation to help his audience feel excited, encouraged, and empowered. He was no longer simply going to throw data at them. This particular client didn't need me to tell him how to generate encouragement and empowerment. He just needed to have the importance of those feelings identified to encourage him to focus on them. He reported later that he felt confident that his presentation was much more impactful than it would have been had he not considered these issues.

Essentially, I used the Salovey, Meyer, and Caruso model as a guide for myself in this coaching session. I focused on what he was feeling, how his feelings were guiding—or to use language from the model, *prioritizing*—his thinking; helped him create insight into his own emotions and thoughts; and finally concentrated on what he wanted his audience to feel at the end of the presentation. This is but one example; I have found this structure to be very useful in many coaching sessions.

### Application 3: Team Coaching Using the Bar-On Model and Measure

A senior leadership team (SLT) led hundreds of employees in a very large company. There had been significant dysfunction in the SLT, which, of course, led to poor performance by employees. As a result, this organization had become “the place where projects go to die.” The SLT's leader was fired, and a coaching client of mine was put in his place. Once my client saw what he was up against, he asked that we work together on a team-building process.

First, we had an orientation meeting to begin to establish the kind of relationship with team members that would be needed to earn the right to attempt to influence their behavior, especially in this very difficult and emotional situation. Among the activities in this meeting, I asked each team member to identify the best team that they had ever been on and tell that story. We analyzed the common themes. As has happened every time I've done this exercise, the themes boiled down to the five skills Patrick Lencioni (2002) identifies in his book *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*.

Next, I conducted an extensive interview with each team member, during which I explored team issues, and learned how the team was functioning. I queried each of them about leadership and EQ issues, asking about leadership skills that they felt were strengths in leading their own parts of this organization as well as areas they felt were opportunities for improvement. I asked behavioral questions to assess EQ skills, which I also assessed with the EQ-i. These interviews served not only to highlight team and individual issues but also to build our relationships sufficiently to prepare for an effective team retreat.

With regard to team issues, I provided a summary report that spotlighted what was going well and what the problem areas for the team were. This content became a guide for working on improving team effectiveness in the retreat that followed. It is a strong bias of mine that team-building retreats need to focus on real work issues, not on such generic activities as a ropes course, because focusing on real issues increases the chances of sustainable team behavior change.

Participants also received individual reports that integrated their EQ scores with what they had told me about their own careers, leadership, issues with their direct reports, and so on. That data allowed me to present participants' EQ scores in a context that identified how improving specific EQ skills could help them achieve their own goals: goals that they had identified in our interviews. In addition, the reports and our discussions in private debrief interviews focused on what they brought to the SLT, both positive and negative, from an EQ perspective. One result was that those who scored low on Empathy came to recognize that they needed to listen to their teammates better if they were going to engage in constructive rather than destructive conflict management.

An additional result was that finger-pointing and scapegoating were dramatically reduced. For example, one highly talented team member had become extremely disaffected, blaming everyone but himself for team problems. Our discussion allowed him to come to recognize what he had contributed to the problems that had so upset him. Doing so brought him peace, opening the door for him to become a better contributor to team functioning. And he did.



Finally, we had an off-site in which we practiced skills within the context of working on the team problems identified in the team-interview report. It was an emotional day. We began with Lencioni's trust-building questions: "Where did you grow up? How many children were there in your family? What was the biggest challenge you faced growing up?" The first two questions are essentially for warming up. The third question is the payoff question. It provides participants the opportunity to be vulnerable, letting their teammates come to know them as human beings, beyond their work persona. As a result, participants were better able to understand each other's behavior, rather than taking unwanted actions personally.

Participants were also invited to share the key elements of their EQ assessments. Each person's open sharing encouraged the same from others. They agreed to help each other build EQ skills that were weak.

Based on the increased trust these two activities created, the team was ready to take on work issues about which they had conflict. To help them do so constructively, we (a) normalized conflict, coming to agreement on the high value of constructive conflict; (b) discussed their comfort level with conflict; (c) created rules to follow when engaged in conflict; and (d) linked constructive conflict to the use of key EQ skills such as Empathy and Assertiveness. The foundation of trust and structure allowed the team to deal with issues that had, heretofore, simply created dysfunction.

As we approached the end of the day, the team created action plans to implement decisions made. Doing so helped members to build the skills Lencioni discusses of commitment, team accountability, and attention to team results.

The team left that day with good feelings and an effective to-do list. Within several months, their organization had become the "go to" organization in the company. Measures of employee optimism and engagement grew dramatically.

### **Realistic Expectations**

Most published articles are full of success stories. But let's be clear. Things do not always work as well as they did in the stories you just read. Significant and sustainable behavior change is difficult. Some clients just do not get very far. There are factors associated with the client, the organization, and even the EQ assessment instrument that can limit the impact of efforts to improve performance through more intelligent use of emotions.

#### **On the Part of the Client**

Some clients who begin coaching with low EQ-i 2.0 scores have shown significant progress. A low score on the EQ-i, remember, does not necessarily mean that the client is not capable of learning these skills; it may simply mean that he or she has not yet learned them. Many of these clients are appreciative of feedback that others might experience as "brutal honesty." It's the only way they can hear the messages, and it can be painful. But they are often grateful that someone is finally letting them in on the secrets that other people seem to know. It may be that these clients were born with the potential to learn EQ, and so were able to capitalize on the coaching.

Certain scores on the EQ-i 2.0, particularly Flexibility and Self-Actualization, may help you predict coaching success. If your client has a low score on Flexibility, you may have your work cut out for you. Building EQ skills requires experimentation with new ideas, feelings, and behaviors. All of that, of course, requires some degree of flexibility. Many people with limited flexibility do not change much. That said, I had one client who struggled in coaching for three years—highly motivated and highly rigid. In the long run, he won the battle with himself, in part because it was a huge priority for him.

The Self-Actualization Scale measures the skill and motivation one has for self-development. Low scores on this scale may indicate that your client is not someone for whom personal growth is a priority.

Some executives have a low capacity for trust. Low trust limits what they will tell you, and limits how much they will allow your coaching to penetrate their barriers.



Or perhaps, as the Salovey, Mayer, and Caruso model would argue, clients who do not succeed were born with limited potential for learning EQ skills.

To be clear, these insights about who might succeed and who might not are based only on my experience with hundreds of coaching clients who have taken the EQ-i. To my knowledge, studies at this level of detail have yet to be conducted.

If a client or company were willing to pay for two assessments, a MSCEIT might provide information about probability of success based on innate potential, with the EQ-i then providing a roadmap of which skills need development. It would be interesting to see how the MSCEIT's predictions correlate with Flexibility and Self-Actualization scores, as well as eventual success in developing the skills targeted by the EQ-i.

### **On the Part of the Organization**

As most readers know and have experienced, it isn't just clients who bring limitations to the table. Sometimes the organization talks a good game but is in reality ill-prepared to foster growth or even effective leadership. I was asked by a federal agency to provide EQ 360s for 15 senior leaders. I met with the agency head and his deputy to negotiate how the 360s would be done, including an introductory workshop and adequate feedback. It appeared that we had agreement on the terms of the engagement needed for this to be a true growth experience for the participants.

Over the ensuing few weeks, it became quite clear that I was wrong. Little by little, decisions were made without my involvement that made it increasingly unlikely that this engagement would have real value. These people were just checking the box. We came to a mutual agreement not to go forward.

### **On the Part of the Instrument**

While the EQ-i is my EQ assessment instrument of choice, it doesn't measure EQ with perfect accuracy. As with every other psychological assessment tool, there is the occasional "test miss." We have to use judgment along with the science of the test.

I use this fact to my advantage in overcoming client resistance to hearing uncomfortable information in our feedback meetings:

If some of the results don't sound like you to you, there are two possible explanations. One is that it is a test miss. While this is an excellent test with excellent science behind it, no test is perfect. The other possible explanation is that there are parts of yourself that you have not let yourself in on yet. We have to take both possibilities seriously.

When reluctant clients hear my willingness not to be all-knowing, they usually are willing to entertain the same about themselves.

## **Conclusion**

EQ has the potential to be a powerful vehicle by which we can deliver psychological expertise in many forms to organizations and the people who work in them. But we must do it right. That means using good science in both our assessment and development methods. In this review, I have tried to summarize the current state-of-the-art of the conceptualization, assessment, and application of EQ to improve the performance of individuals and teams. Hopefully, the theory, research, and experiences described here can inform good decisions about which models and assessment tools to use in EQ-based interventions.

It also is worth emphasizing that although models and tools are an important part of good consulting practice, they cannot be the only focus. As is well known, the relationship with the client and the relationship with the client's organization are the most powerful determinants of the outcome (de Haan, Duckworth, Birch, & Jones, 2013). When we earn a client's trust with our skill, insight, and grounded claims, good things are likely to happen. When it comes to EQ, there is no



need to exaggerate its importance or research support. EQ is but one piece of the performance puzzle, and although it is an important piece, it is not a silver bullet. Clients are more likely to be satisfied with EQ-based interventions to the extent that they have realistic expectations about likely benefits.

But of course, good science and informed practice can only take us to the next frontier, which we encounter with our clients all the time. Therefore, we have to take our good judgment with us as well. Armed with the latest research insights, applied in strong partnership with our clients, we have to work our way through the complex and sometimes messy human emotions and interpersonal dynamics that science is unable to model precisely. And that is the nature of working with EQ.

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