



In the first of a three-part series, **Dr Ken Nowack** and **Andrew Munro** explore emotional and social competence in organisations

Now is the perfect time for an update about emotional and social competence (ESC) in organisations. We'll start by exploring whether ESC is unique or no more than a new label for 'old wine in a new bottle.' Next month, we'll explore ESC differences in men and women, and discuss whether women have a leadership advantage over their male counterparts. Finally, in the last part of our series, we will explore the upside, downside and even dark side of ESC.

So, to begin. During the last decade, the topic of ESC has become extremely popular as observed in a wave of publications and the proliferation of assessments. Despite the lack of consensus around the concept, ESC has gained significant organisational traction.

Historically, two definitions have been applied to the definition and measurement of ESC. The first conceptualises it as a facet of intelligence and/or a set of abilities to recognise and regulate emotions in ourselves and in others.

The second encompasses ESC as an amalgamation of personality traits such as the 'big five' (extroversion, agreeableness, openness, conscientiousness and neuroticism), other self-perceived abilities and interpersonal behaviours.

Recent claims about the relationship between various measures of ESC and job performance have stimulated interest from consultants and practitioners in a range of diagnostic tools. These assessments are now shaping key resourcing and development decisions: who gets hired, who is marked as high potential, who gets promoted and who gets fired.

Given the differences in the definition, measurement and validity of ESC, is the marketing claim ahead of the evidence base? What does the recent research linking the assessment of ESC to key organisational outcomes indicate about the opportunities as well as some of the limitations?

In light of such differences in the definition, measurement and validity of ESC, it is not surprising that practitioners are often confused. Which ESC application should be used for different assessment and development interventions? How are these new vendor products different to the current applications we use? What gains can be expected from the implementation of ESC?

What is ESC?

Is ESC just another grab-bag of older concepts in psychology?

Recent evidence suggests that ESC is likely to be a blending of general cognitive ability, social intelligence, interpersonal competence, self-awareness, emotional control, relationship intelligence, aspects of the big five personality factors, resilience, core self-evaluations and transformational leadership factors.

Most researchers and practitioners agree there are at least three different



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models to conceptualise and measure ESC, given the diversity of contributing psychological factors. Each model has been shown to be significantly associated with diverse individual and organisational outcomes in research, but it remains unclear whether one approach is better than another (see Other Resources at the end of the feature for additional examples of concepts and specific measures of ESC). As shown in Fig.1, below, these three broad models can be described as:

Personality/trait

This approach was popularised by Reuven Bar-On (1997) and consists of five main components

of skills and abilities including self-perception, self-expression, stress management, interpersonal skills and decision-making.

Behavioural/mixed

This approach is often conceptually based on the work of Daniel Goleman and Richard Boyatzis (2008) and orients ESC as a set of social and emotional competencies associated with performance, health and success. This popular ESC model organises a set of competencies and behaviours typically organised along four areas: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and social/relationship management.

Ability

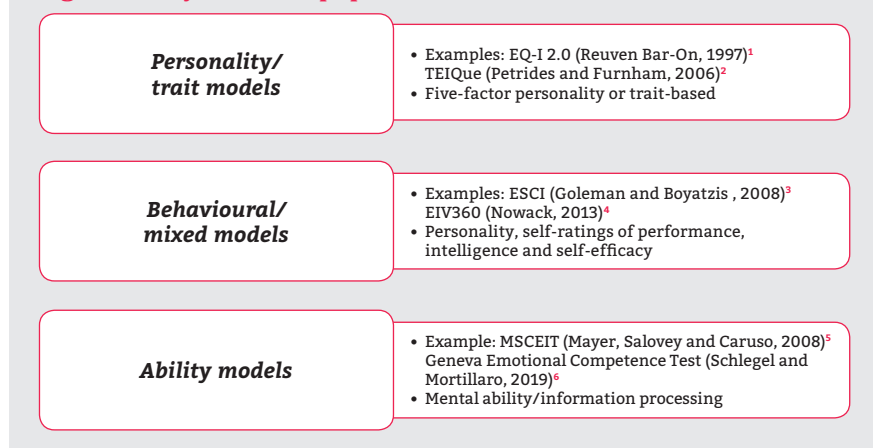
Another approach is based on the work of Jack Mayer, Peter Salovey and other colleagues (2008) who conceptualise ESC as a true cognitive or general mental ability (GMA) that has four unique branches: ability to perceive emotions, ability to use emotions, ability to understand emotions and ability to manage emotions in self and others.

What ESC assessment should I use?

The diverse conceptualisations of ESC have resulted in a variety of self-report, 360-degree feedback, personality/style and ability-based measures to select from. Many of these measures of ESC appear to be very independent of each other. For example, our own behavioural/mixed model assessment of ESC does not correlate at all with standard ability-based measures such as the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT).

The decision of which ESC →

Figure 1: A synthesis of popular ESC models



assessment to use might well depend on the purpose of your programme and specific outcomes you want in your training and coaching engagements.

What does ESC predict and mean?

In general, a growing literature seems to support a significant relationship between the different measures of ESC job satisfaction, organisational citizenship behaviour and performance – particularly in what have been called ‘high emotional labour’ positions.

When ESC are not highly job related, there appears to be a negative relationship between ESC and performance. Here, more ESC makes for lower performance levels!

A much newer meta-analytic review by professor Dana Joseph (University of Central Florida) and colleagues⁷ helps to clarify the most current associations between diverse measures of ESC and various organisational outcomes. This provides a nuanced set of findings; a nuance which may be lost in the noise of marketing hype and practitioner promise.



The decision of which ESC assessment to use might well depend on the purpose of your programme and specific outcomes you want in your training and coaching engagements

The following important findings can be distilled from this latest research:

- ▶ Ability-based measures of ESC do show a strong association with general cognitive ability/intelligence and little overlap with the other type of measures.
- ▶ Popular personality-based measures of ESC (such as EQ-I 2.0) demonstrate a very large overlap with the big five personality factors (one study found that measures of big five personality traits and general mental ability accounted for two-thirds of the variance of the EQ-I but only 14% of the variance in the MSCEIT).

- ▶ The most recent meta-analytic findings suggest that both ability-based and mixed/behavioural measures of ESC significantly predict supervisory ratings of job performance, job satisfaction and counterproductive work behaviour. These associations are meaningful and of the order of any other known big five personality factors such as conscientiousness or emotional stability.
- ▶ Both ability-based and mixed/behavioural measures of ESC generally do not show incremental validity in job performance above cognitive ability, personality and self-ratings of job performance. This means that many of the popular vendor products, rather than measuring something new, may be nothing more than a variation of established assessments. There is nothing necessarily wrong with a refresh of constructs and language, but any marketing claim of the superior validity of these applications is overstated, based on current research.
- ▶ For use in personnel selection, practitioners need to select between the use of longer questionnaires that uniquely measure personality, cognitive ability and self-efficacy with stronger associations with job performance or proprietary vendor assessments now available on the market. Most people are less accurate rating their skills and abilities (in psychology, the ‘Dunning Kruger effect’ refers to a bias in which people of low ability mistakenly assess their skill level as higher than it is) but far less so for self-rating accuracy of one’s personality.
- ▶ Practitioners must decide whether to elect to use ability-based ESC measures that more precisely evaluate the notion of this concept as a true intelligence than behaviour/mixed ESC assessments which actually have slightly higher correlations with job performance.

Conclusion

The conceptualisation and measurement of ESC has come a long way in the last decades. Trainers, coaches and organisations using ESC should be very clear in defining the concept and which model of ESC makes the most sense for the required outcomes. It is

unlikely there is one all-encompassing ESC tool that will work equally well across a range of assessment and development programme interventions.

Despite its popularity, we still don’t completely know about the association of ESC with other important organisational outcomes such as job engagement, retention, civility or team effectiveness.

However, one thing is fairly certain. The label on the bottle may indicate a more palatable wine. But the wine in the bottle largely remains unchanged. **TJ**

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References

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- 3 D Goleman and R Boyatzis (2008). Social Intelligence and the Biology of Leadership. *Harvard Business Review*, 86, 74-81.
- 4 K Nowack (2013). Development and Interpretation of the Emotional Intelligence View 360. Jean Brittain Leslie, *Feedback to Managers: A Guide to Reviewing and Selecting Multirater Instruments for Leadership Development*, 4th Edition, Center for Creative Leadership, pp. 172-184.
- 5 JD Mayer, P Salovey and DR Caruso (2008). Emotional Intelligence: New Ability or Eclectic Traits? *American Psychologist*, 63, 503-517.
- 6 K Schlegel and M Mortillaro (2019). The Geneva Emotional Competence Test (GEC): An Ability Measure of Workplace Emotional Intelligence. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 104, 559-580.
- 7 DL Joseph, J Jin, SA Newman and EH Boyle (2015). Why Does Self-reported Emotional Intelligence Predict Job Performance? A Meta-analytic Investigation of Mixed EI. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 100, 298-342.

Other resources

- www.eiconsortium.org
- <https://casel.org>
- <http://www.emotionsnet.org>
- <http://www.esade.edu/research-webs/eng/glead>
- <http://www.isre.org>
- <http://www.positivepsychology.org>